This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

WINNER TAKE ALL

LARRY EVANS

1. No subject

WINNER TAKE ALL

WINNER TAKE ALL

BY
LARRY EVANS
AUTHOR OF
"ONCE TO EVERY MAN,"
"THEN I'LL COME BACK TO YOU," ETC.

New York
THE H. K. FLY COMPANY
Publishers

THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY
578752B
ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS
R 1951 L

Copyright, 1920, by
THE H. K. FLY COMPANY

Copyright, 1920, by
THE METROPOLITAN MAGAZINE COMPANY

TO

GEORGE C. TYLER

Some of these pages you have criticised, some of them you have praised; and all of them beg leave to recall herewith the Author's esteem and affection.

50X 7

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	Is Luck a Lady?	9
II.	Ride Him, Cowboy!	23
III.	Little-Tweed-Suit	55
IV.	All Else Is Heresy	77
V.	Champion! Champion!	103
VI.	Felicity Crosses Broadway	124
VII.	As Willows Bud in Spring	140
VIII.	My Lad	150
IX.	Dunham Talks Business	162
X.	Cecille Plays the Game	172
XI.	Pots and Pans!	197
XII.	Winner Take All	222
XIII.	Blue for a Boy	237

WINNER TAKE ALL

CHAPTER I

Is Luck a Lady?

BY easy stages Blue Jeans had arrived at the water tanks.

That had not pleased him much, though the water which fell in a musical drip from the stack nearest the rails into what impressed one as a sensible, frugal tub, until it, too, filled and overflowed and betrayed its trivial nature, was sweet on his tongue and grateful to his mare.

Arriving anywhere by easy stages had never appealed to him. Swift and sudden, that was the better way. Rather would he have whirled into Reservoir with zest and some commotion. But Girl o' Mine was in no shape for that. She drooped. Events which had jostled him roughly in the last few weeks

had dealt with her unkindly as well. There had been many weary miles and not much grain.

And yet his poverty had not been a thing of easy stages. It had seemed both swift and sudden, and he liked it none the better for that. But he would not enter Reservoir with ostentation. He'd ride in without enthusiasm, and thus call no attention to the pass to which he'd come.

Nor was he in a hurry to get there, either. The town, a quarter of a mile across the track, squat and squalid in the dust, held nothing for his mood.

Reservoir was a poor town, anyway.

And Life was a poor thing, too.

He'd tried for hours and hours to think of one fair promise which it still held for him—just one!—tried hard! And couldn't!

Blue Jeans was twenty-two.

And Luck had trifled with him over-long.

One brief month earlier he had been a man

of ambition, a man of promise. He'd even found his Dream. An Easterner had helped him to that foolishness; an -ologist from a university who expected to find prehistoric bones and relics entombed under the hills.

Cornered by that Easterner, who liked his face, and not having been handy enough as a liar to get out of it neatly, Blue Jeans had admitted under cross-examination that he was familiar with the country.

Was he doing anything at present?

No-o-o. But he was looking around.

Could he pack?

Yes.

Was he accustomed to horses?

He hoped so.

Could he cook?

Ye-s-s, some. Not good for delicate folks.

Well, then, he was the very man for the position.

And Blue Jeans hadn't been able to think offhand of an objection; not one which he

wanted to voice. He couldn't admit outright that the prospect was dismaying to his young pride. That he was afraid of the ridicule which certainly it would bring down upon him.

"I'm a cowpuncher, not a grave-robber," was the way it rose to his mind. But that wouldn't serve. It sounded neither dignified nor convincing.

Then if that was settled, what remuneration would he expect per month?

He had been of astonishing though dense persistence, that professor. Blue Jeans had pounced upon the query with sensations of deliverance.

"Wel-l-l," and he named a figure which struck him as outrageous.

But it hadn't staggered the professor; it hadn't even made him hesitate. The professor's expenses in the field were already guaranteed, back home, by men who could afford it.

"Then it's settled," he had said.

And Blue Jeans, who forgot immediately that he had been dragged, struggling, into this bargain and began to view it as a deal of his own shrewd consummation, had scorned himself for two whole hours for not having made it twice as outrageous at least.

Thus had it started.

By night he had figured out how great the sum he had mentioned would be, multiplied by six. The professor planned to be out that long. By morning he had spent some money, quite a little money, in anticipation of it. But that was not cause for worry; prosperity was shining in his eyes. He was going to be a man of substance. And he would save, for the Dream was bright. And then the professor spoiled it all by mistaking a mule for a horse.

The mule had not kicked him hard. If that had been the case, Blue Jeans might have found it in his heart to be sorry for him. A

less frail man would have suffered less. As it was he spent his sympathy on himself. And when directly the professor sent for him and intimated that owing to the unavoidable postponement of the trip he was again out of employment, he had not lingered to listen.

"Of course, if you care to hang about," the professor had suggested, "until I can travel once more—"

He had not even found it in his heart to be polite.

"Hanging about is just what ails me," he finished it. "The devil, he finds mischief for my idle hands to do. You can wait till you're able, but I'm going to travel *now!*"

And he made good his word without further loss of time, first paying painfully the sums which he had spent in fond anticipation, and enduring with a grin the ridicule which was double, because he had made no trip at all.

Last of all, before departing he went around to the stable and fed the mule some sugar.

He had found a new job hard to locate. And the Dream had lost definition and grown dim and distant. It was late for looking around. The outfits all were full. If he could have cooked—but he couldn't. Not for a bunch of plain-spoken cowmen. Not without risking bodily harm. He'd told almost the truth about that. And then he landed with the Dee & Zee.

At any other time the Dee & Zee could not have hired him. He had heard things. But he had lost at last his desire to pick and choose. And he began to think, after he had started work there, that folks had been mistaken. He liked the place, and it seemed permanent. He even went back to the Dream and refurbished it a bit. And then he learned that the superintendent didn't like him. The superintendent, it appeared, could never bring himself to care much for any man whose scruples were too flourishing. That's what Blue Jeans had heard and almost begun to dis-

believe. Everybody had heard it except the Dee & Zee syndicate owners themselves. But that did him small good. He doubted no longer, however. He quit. He resigned by request.

But when he thought to collect the little pay due him, he experienced difficulty. He made a desperate effort and crowded the issue perilously. When, however, in the face of superior numbers and their eagerness for him to insist, he realized that he would be in no condition to enjoy the money, even if he did succeed in collecting it, he did the thing of indubitable valor. He gave it up gracefully. A coward would have been ashamed to back down, and thus got himself thoroughly killed. He laughed. And moved his right hand further from his holster.

But this time he had waxed stubborn; he had refused to let his Dream grow dim.

And the Box-A people—three weeks later they could have used him. And would have.

He knew it. A man had been badly hurt; so badly that he would never know anything any more. They could have used him, only the superintendent had just passed that way and outstripped him. They were too busy, therefore, with sober work, too harmonious among themselves, to risk a firebrand.

"A firebrand? Him!"

He had tried to laugh again, but he knew that his laughter was hollow. It is hard to be blithe and all but broke. Nor had he pled this latter state to urge himself upon them. Anybody could draw that conclusion now, if he wanted to, just from the look of his clothes.

He'd tried Claiborne—town. Little jobs they had offered him there—menial! And that had made him rebellious.

Thus by well-defined stages, and hugging now his Dream, to the stud-poker game.

All that he possessed he'd sold and put it on this venture; all but his saddle and bridle and gun, and Girl o' Mine. He played stud-

poker well; better than most men he knew; and that was no empty conceit, either. He just did. Some men's judgment was quicker, surer than others, that was all.

And he had played well last night. But he could not overcome with nerve what he had lacked in capital. Five cards and many dollars oft will beat a better hand. But his dollars had been few. So had he tested again a time-tried truth, and proved it. A man should not gamble at all; that is, not when he needs to win. For then he was sure to lose. That was why they called luck a lady.

Clink your money in your pocket and not care whether you won or lost, and she'd fair swarm upon you. She wouldn't *let* you be! Nothing was too good for you—you were a king! Two deuces and a lazy smile would bluff a brace of aces.

But just you let her guess that your straits were desperate. Just you let her guess that your last dollar was on the table! You

couldn't catch a pair back to back in forty-seven years. She'd quit you flat!

That was why they called luck a lady. Just like a woman!

And he had lost less composedly than they had suspected from his face and comment. He had gone, then, still early, to bed to escape their torment. It was not often that they had found him so completely at their mercy, and they made the most of it.

And he'd risen and ridden out at dawn toward Reservoir. Reservoir would offer nothing; but it was on the road he meant to travel, and water was to be had there. He rode early because he did not choose that any of his pitiless opponents of the night before should surmise that the torn, worn jeans and old cracked boots and shirt with a rent in the elbow was not merely his working garb, worn informally because he had not wanted to waste time in changing and slicking up, but the only garb he owned.

If they had believed his decent outfit to be rolled in the blanket behind his saddle, let them. He'd not disillusion them. Then they'd not come around, embarrassing him and themselves as well, with awkward offers of a loan.

He rode at daybreak, and in the splendor of that desert dawn forgot for a time to be desolate. Girl o' Mine stepped smartly in the early cool. He had paid for her breakfast before he tried at poker. He forgot himself, and presently he raised a light-hearted carol to the shuffle, shuffle, shuffle of her hoofs.

"Daughters of Pleasure, one and all,
Of form and feature delicate,
Of bodies slim and bosoms small,
With feet and fingers white and straight,
Your eyes are bright, your grace is great,
To hold your lover's heart in thrall;
Use your red lips before too late,
Love ere love flies beyond recall."

He didn't know where he had learned that.

Nor did he know that it was the lay of another vagabond, a dreamer light-hearted in adversity. But it was good—some folks might question its morality—but it was good—good philosophy. Swift and sudden, that was the better way. And sad, too, a little.

He sang it again and again.

But the sun rose higher and the sand grew hot. And the gorgeous sky was gorgeous no longer, but a glimmer of savage heat.

Little by little Girl o' Mine's head drooped. Dust settled white upon her, and she became streaked with sweat. And little by little the song was stilled.

He remembered then, abruptly. He was disconsolate. He had no call to sing. He had been a dreamer, too—but that was ages and ages ago, and long, long gone for him. He was only the vagabond.

He'd been nearly broke? Well, he was all broke now. And better that way! Half way was no good. It was better to be an out-and-

out than a neither-one-nor-the-other. He had had some large plans, until the professor had started the run against him. He'd had a Vision, a vision of prosperity and himself a settled man. And maybe some day—some day, when he'd proved himself—when he'd found Her—

He wouldn't even tell himself how disappointed he was.

Noon came and they tarried a while. There was no hurry; they weren't going anywhere,—not anywhere in particular. Presently they started on again. And through the glare of afternoon they passed along the horizon, a despondent scarecrow upon a dejected horse.

CHAPTER II

RIDE HIM, COWBOY!

SO to the tanks; but here at least was a little luck. The tub was full and overflowing; he would not have to cause the agent to swear by swinging round the nozzle and wasting of his water. And something besides sagebrush and sand to look at, too. For upon the tracks stood a train; a train packed very full with men whose faces showed white at the windows,—indoor men, Eastern men,—and a private car at the end of the string.

All men! Well, that would be the special train, come through from the other coast; the prize-fight special,—and the last section, at that. There was no man up the tracks with a red flag to guard against a pile-up. And they also looked bored; they must have been standing there quite a while. And hot. So, you see, his plight was not so bad! He didn't

have to breathe that air and sit in a slippery red-plush seat. Not much!

He went to the drip, serenely careless of the thousand eyes upon him; he drank and clicked to Girl o' Mine, his mare. She pricked up her ears and approached a step or two; she tossed her head and whinnied; she was afraid of the drip and spatter of the overflow.

He drank again.

"See," he said, "it'll not hurt you. Plain water—that's all—awful plain! Sure, you're unstrung—but that's nothing. So am I. We both been under a strain. But I'm not asking you to do anything I'll not do myself. See, I'm drinking it—just plain water! There—what'd I tell you? See!"

The mare had edged nearer, eagerly, while he talked. She was very thirsty, though fearful. And at length his voice reassured her; she thrust her velvet nostrils into the tub.

Then he seated himself upon a foundation timber of the tank and rolled a cigarette. His

toilet could wait. He wasn't going to ride into Reservoir and advertise his straits,—not to a lot of half-breeds and Mexicans and worse. He could wait; years and years of time were before him. For, vindictively, he wasn't going to provide a spectacle for those eyes at the windows to watch either; eyes hungry to look upon anything—anything—if only it wasn't empty desert. Not even the spectacle of a scarecrow making himself neat and clean,—not him! Let 'em suffer and be bored. He was bored himself!

He smoked and meditated, and presently a shadow fell athwart his lap. Another horseman was arriving, and he was creating not mild interest but a veritable stir at the windows. For he was different, oh-so-different! He drew the eye with his magnificence. His chaps were new and so was his shirt and his hat had cost thirty dollars. And Blue Jeans could almost hear them exclaiming as they crowded to the panes.

This was the real thing! You bet! No fringy-panted scarecrow upon a horse too good for him—stolen probably at that. Well, I guess not! This was a bit of the real West—the old West. Look at them spurs. Silver—solid! A regular cowboy!

And the newcomer had been quick to sense this too. He was on his way out from Reservoir, traveling north. Of course he would be traveling north—the Dee & Zee lay in that quarter—and this magnificence was the Dee & Zee superintendent. More than that, his horse was fresh up from the stable, and the stable hands were not accustomed to sending a horse out thirsty into the desert, but he did not now pause to consider this. He felt the eye of that whole train upon him, its approval, its admiration, and his importance grew. He couldn't help it; he played up to his audience. Some men invariably will, with the eye of the world upon them. They're made that way.

Just for an instant the sight of that familiar

figure, quiet there before him, had given him an unpleasant start. The little matter of unpaid back wages had crowded to mind and simultaneously a realization that in numbers he was no longer superior, and therefore not equal in other essentials. Just for an instant—and then the fact of the train reassured him. Blue Jeans, hardy though he undoubtedly was and in desperate need of cash, would scarcely venture force so publicly. It would look to be nothing but rankest hold-up and robbery. And when Blue Jeans, having out-thought him and arrived already at the same depressing conclusion, let his regret show in his face, the superintendent swelled some more. It appeared quite safe.

"Back that horse away from that bucket," he directed. It was the voice of authority commanding the urchin on the curb; of seasoned seniority chiding the heedlessness of the stripling of twenty-two.

"Can't you see that my beast wants water?"

Blue Jeans was deeply offended. Such opulence in anyone at such a moment would have seemed a needless taunt; that chance had selected the superintendent to flaunt it was surplusage of insult. Yet he could not even resent the superintendent's gesture, wide-flung and arrogant to all beholders. Again the superintendent looked to have the right of it. He clicked to Girl o' Mine and she came to him, out of the way, like an obedient puppy.

And then began the performance for the benefit of the car windows, and which the car windows enjoyed. This picturesque son of the real West, this colorful figure in new chaps and new shirt and thirty dollar hat, tried to ride his horse up to the tub. And the horse would not go. In the first place the horse was not thirsty; in the second place, like Girl o' Mine, he was exceedingly afraid. Yet in the beginning, when the Dee & Zee superintendent scratched him with the solid silver spurs by

way of comforting him, he merely rose on his hind legs, but no nearer the tank.

At any other time the superintendent, who was not an unusual fool, would have done the wiser thing; he would have dismounted and led his animal. But now, even though he might have bested his own vanity in spite of the car windows, Blue Jeans would not permit it. Blue Jeans had been quick to see where this might lead and spoke with malicious calculation.

"I thought your horse wanted water?" he drawled, as the superintendent paused to consider his course. "Pshaw! He ain't so plumb crazy for it!"

That settled it. It grew instantly furious and cruel. The superintendent no longer merely scratched with the rowels; he drove them home. And the roan horse plunged and bucked and staggered.

It was hot and the sawing bit raised quickly a white slaver. The roan wasn't a bad horse

at heart; he was frightened at something he couldn't understand. He tried to break and run. But at his bad heart the superintendent wasn't even a man, and no damned bronco was going to have his way with him. He rounded him back and sent him full at that tinkling, dreadful drip once more. So the roan fought on, till tumult rose within the cars.

This was real! This was regular! One wiser than the rest—one who thought himself schooled in the vernacular, because he had once witnessed a Frontier Week celebration at Cheyenne—seized upon this opportunity to air his vocabulary.

The sashes had been left closed to exclude sand and cinders. He tugged one open now and sent forth his voice.

"Hi yi yi-i-p," he shouted. "Ride him, cowboy!"

And the superintendent rode him! Rode him till the slaver turned red and the spurs were a torture to the raw torn flanks. Rode

him till his eyes rolled white and crazed. For the superintendent had gone mad too, mad with vain rage. He laid his rope across the roan's dripping withers; it did not help; it was inadequate. With staring eyes he cast about for a more efficient weapon. Then he drew his gun from its holster.

"You won't, eh, you—?" he panted, foaming a little himself. "You won't, eh? Try that! Maybe that'll persuade you!" And holding the long blue sixshooter by its barrel, he struck the roan heavily with the butt just behind the eyes. Immediately the roan stood stock-still and slowly closed his eyes. A less strong-hearted horse would have sunk to the ground. But the superintendent was blind now to the pass to which he had brought his mount.

"Maybe that'll persuade you! Maybe that—" He mouthed the words thickly and would have struck again.

But just then Blue Jeans struck him.

Blue Jeans took his gun away from him.

How weak is that poor word! Took? It would not have been so simple a recital had not the weapon been reversed in the superintendent's hand for the hazing of the roan. The train would have been treated otherwise to a bit of the real West indeed, for the superintendent was beyond all sane thought or discretion. Blue Jeans took his gun away from him. As the superintendent would have thrust it into his face to fire he struck the outstretched wrist with the edge of his stiffened hand, and it fell to the ground.

Then Blue Jeans took the superintendent from the saddle.

And now the train rocked and roared. This was not novelty, but it was good. This was what they had come West to see, but better —better! Better fifty times over than the tame affair which the world's championship heavy-weight bout at Denver had turned out to be. This was a fight. You said it—a fight!

The superintendent fought with wasteful

fury; Blue Jeans with a cold hatred of his cruelty—a cold and bitter hatred of his opulence. The superintendent struck him once with a wild, wide swing. Once—only once. For he hugged to the superintendent after that and those wild swings went past. And he jabbed! And jabbed! And jabbed!

After a while the foeman would have clinched, but Blue Jeans prevented that. That would not do; the superintendent was heavy and he was slight. So from a position always before his own face his fists battered the other man's features blank. And he tore that new shirt, and trampled on the thirty dollar hat; and the chaps grew old and dingy from constant falling and rising.

Later the superintendent rose less readily; later still he did not rise at all. Then Blue Jeans watered his horse for him and led it where he lay. With a heave he tossed the once pretty puncher into the saddle,—he was pretty no longer. He returned his gun. But

he broke that weapon and extracted the shells before he gave it back.

"There it is," he told the beaten man, and instantly a light leaped to the half-closed eyes.

Blue Jeans read it.

"Oh, it ain't loaded. See! And he flung afar the handful of cartridges.

"It ain't loaded, and don't you load it, either. Don't you try to load it, till you're out of sight. Don't you even think to try to load it. If you do—if you do—"

He went back to his seat on the timber.

And the train rocked no more. It became instead loquacious.

"Didn't I tell you?" it demanded. "Didn't I say so, the minute I spotted that moving-picture scenery! You didn't think real cowboys dolled up like that, did you? You did? My Gawd! But that other bird—look at him! Sure —smoking his cigarette as if nothing had happened. Bet he rolls 'em with one hand! Bet he rolls 'em with one hand, going

at a gallop! And dressed for business all the while! Gentlemen, you're looking at a cowboy!"

And the wise one—the one who had been in Cheyenne during Frontier Week—capped it all, nonchalantly. He'd never hoped to have such a happy chance to display his vocabulary.

"One bad hombre," he declared. "One bad hombre!"

Oh, but they were loquacious! They forgot the heat and delay; they would have risen to a man and gone out to him who sat, back toward them, on the timber base of the tank, only they were afraid that the train might pull out without them. So they had to be content with watching him while they continued to tell each other what good offhand judges of human nature they were.

Not so, however, in the private car at the end of the row of coaches. No noise had come from its occupants during even the worst,

or the best, of it. First tense attention and then when it was over and the superintendent had ridden away, three pairs of eyes which, turned upon each other, were startled, questioning.

One of the men was tall and fat, and prosperous to the casual eye, as he most surely must have been offensive to the fastidious. One of them was short and fat, with pointed ears that made him look quite fox-faced. And the other was a reporter. From his appearance one would have said I hope, and truly, that only pursuit of his calling could have brought him in such company.

These three, then, sat for a time and looked eloquently at each other. They were not loquacious about it, not verbally; and finally the tall fat one heaved himself from his seat.

"I've got a hunch," he declared, "and God never forgives a man who doesn't ride one." Certainly he was a strange person to be mentioning God so complacently.

"Pull the bell cord if that fool engineer tries to start without me." And he left the car.

So presently another shadow fell athwart Blue Jeans' lap. He did not bother to raise his head this time, however; he was nursing a bruised hand and craved solitude. The fat man stood and looked down at him until he realized that the other was likely never to look up, unless he did something besides impose his plainly unwelcome presence upon him. Therefore he cleared his throat—"hm-m-m."

"Don't hm-m-m me," snarled Blue Jeans promptly. "And get out of my light."

In his own way the huge man was a genius, for surely nothing else could have accomplished it.

"Warm, isn't it?" he commented; and at that inanity Blue Jeans raised his head.

The huge man had his first fair view of the other's fine hard youth; and while he observed

the self-possessed eyes and long nose, acquisitive and courageous, Blue Jeans devoted the interval to a counter-scrutiny. He scanned the newcomer from head to foot, silk hose and hair-line suit and expensive panama. The rings upon those pudgy fingers held longest his wandering eye, the blue-white fortune in the burnt-orange cravat. But all this seemed to kindle no approval.

"Prosperous!" he muttered bitterly. "Prosperous! And yet I don't hate you like I did that superintendent. Just as much maybe, but not just the same. . . . Go away!"

But the huge man smiled and stood his ground until finally Blue Jeans slanted his head at him, wickedly, and fell to talking again.

"I could pluck that stone from out your tie *that* easy!" And his voice held no assurance that he would not act upon his words. "Just as easy! Yes, and I could beat you over the head with my gun—oh, sure I've got one!—

just like he beat that roan horse, and strip your pockets and be clean away before one of those"—he nodded over his shoulder at the train—"could think to call for help. And thinking to call for help would come quicker to them than thinking to help without calling. And Girl o' Mine would carry me clear in five minutes."

He paused remorselessly, as if to let this sink in, but out of the silence, "I don't scare easily," the huge man said.

"Pshaw! I'm not telling you to try to scare you," Blue Jeans scoffed. "I'm telling myself how simple it could be—and wondering why I don't do it!"

"I can tell you that," answered the Easterner. "Because you're honest."

But that was not subtle, and he realized the flattery had been ill-chosen, even before Blue Jeans flared, which was almost instantaneously.

"Don't you tell *me* I'm honest! Don't you

dare even hint I am! It's honesty brought me here."

The huge man laughed gently. He'd made one mistake; few could accuse him of repeating in stupidity. He took accurate stock of the symptoms; set his sights upon what he surmised must be the bull's-eye of Blue Jeans' discontent; waited a nicely balanced moment, and fired.

"How," he inquired in a tone both mild and unsensational, "how would you like to earn two hundred dollars?"

But the shot did not take effect as he had expected it to. Instead of snapping back Blue Jeans' curly head sank a little lower. Though his inward start at the query had been great his outward display of emotion was scarcely visible. For perceiving that this was a deliberate attempt to arouse his interest, he dissembled it and exhibited no interest at all.

"I balk at murder," he replied with careful indifference and no flicker of jocularity.

"And it would have to be that, to earn that much money. Two hundred dollars is a fortune; so's one; so's fifty. But I'm kind of particular that way—though the offer is liberal—it is so! I admit that, but I—"

He would have gone on rambling had not the other stopped him.

"Sure, it's a nice bunch of coin." And then, daring to be facetious himself, though adhering still to his admirable and just-formed plan of not disclosing too much at once:

"You'd not have to kill him, you know. Half of what you did to your friend on the roan horse would be plenty and to spare."

"He was no friend of mine," Blue Jeans corrected coldly. "We'd just barely begun to get acquainted."

"Lucky for him!" Indeed, despite his personality, the huge man had a lively wit.

"A life-long friendship would have proved fatal!"

It made Blue Jeans' eyes twinkle though it

warmed them not at all. He didn't like the fat man and he wasn't going to try. But when the latter showed no readiness to go back to the important topic which he had himself introduced, he found anxiety overcoming his resolution to remain unconcerned.

"You were speaking intimately of two hundred dollars," he drew it back tentatively.

And then the huge man knew that it was best to be precise.

"For eighteen minutes' work," he explained. "Six rounds with young Condit, at Estabrook, on the tenth."

"Me!" Blue Jeans blurted his surprise, it was so far from the sort of proposition he had been prepared to hear. In spite of his habiliments the Easterner was no new type to him, and he had been ready to dismiss him and his project, whenever it should develop, with a satisfying frankness which could not have been admitted here. But this tripped him,—stripped him momentarily of his self-possession.

"Me!" he deprecated. "Pshaw! I'm no box-fighter! I don't box!"

"Sure you don't," the huge man agreed, eagerly and instantly. "That's what I saw as I watched you from the window, arguing with your fr—your acquaintance. The whole world is full of box-fighters who box. You'll look years and years, however, before you'll find one who will fight."

Blue Jeans had learned to make his decisions quickly, and to abide later by their results without complaint. Swift and sudden, that was the better way. But here was no step to be taken ill-considered. He wasn't sick of cowpunching; he hadn't had half enough of it; he'd never have enough. But he was sick of punching other men's cattle. And he'd been maturing lately, getting full-grown ideas into his head. There wasn't any future for him, or for any man, hellin' around the country. But if a man was to settle down,—that was the Dream!

And he knew the place,—back of Big Thumb Butte. Good pasture; not too big, but enough for any bunch he was ever likely to own. Some fence; some buildings; both in a sad state but reclaimable by a handy man. And water! The finest water in all the country, and it never failed. And cheap! Cheap if one kept one's mind on relative values and off one's own financial troubles; cheap if one didn't pause to recollect that six bits, at the moment, would have been a prohibitive price.

He'd got his eye on that place lately; that's why he had tried so hard with the Dee & Zee; that's why he had been over-anxious at poker. He'd even figured how, by being saving and eating nothing to speak of and drinking nothing at all, he could save up half the price in about twenty years. But he'd be old in twenty years, past forty, and tottering and toothless without doubt. Unless Opportunity —*was* this Opportunity?

He didn't like that game—not much—not

at all! But, then, he didn't know much about it; he could judge only by externals, by the clique who made it their profession. And he'd liked none of them any better than he did this huge Easterner standing before him, waiting for an answer.

But if this was Opportunity—he didn't have to mix—he could herd by himself, as he had at the Dee & Zee. And it was the best water in the county, and somebody, pretty soon, was going to see the possibilities in that valley and snap it up. And then where'd he be? He wanted to become a solid citizen; he wanted to amount to something *now*.

He raised a chill, gray-green eye.

"You can say on," he gave leave calmly.

But the huge man drew a slip of cardboard from his pocket instead, and wrote upon it. It seemed to be one of a stock for such emergencies, for it bore no engraving.

"If you'll carry this to Harry Larrabie, he'll understand. He'll give you what you need

and send you against Condit Saturday night. Short notice for you, I know, but you look to be in shape." He glanced at the lean length.

"One hundred and twenty-eight?"

"Thirty-two," said Blue Jeans, and somehow resentfully.

"Fine—fine! Well?"

Blue Jeans had learned to make decisions with suddenness. He gave this one, however, a full five seconds' consideration. Then he reached out and possessed himself of the card.

"Scratch Blake and send bearer against Condit Saturday. If he looks as good to you as he has to me, keep him busy. Some day I may have employment for him myself."

It was signed with the single letter D.

"There are no strings to it, after Condit?" Blue Jeans asked finally.

"None—if you want to quit. None."

"Then what is there in it for you?"

Blue Jeans had been schooled to be skeptical concerning any act masking as purely philan-

thropic. But the huge man wisely disclaimed such motives.

"Maybe you won't want to quit,—not right away." He had taken accurate account of the symptoms. Everybody wanted money, but this man's desire, he discerned, though great, was curbed and disciplined. It was not feverish, as if ambitious merely of a few days of debauch in town. It was controlled, and fixed and steady.

"You'll find other two hundreds waiting," said he.

"That's your gamble?"

"That's my gamble."

Again the card.

"There's no sum mentioned here."

Keenly the huge man's regard played over him. A scarecrow without question,—poverty had had shabby sport with him,—but honest. You couldn't mistake it. The large man's flattery had been ill-chosen, yet well-founded. He drew two one hundred dollar

bills from a folder and handed them to Blue Jeans.

"That'll let you buy some clothes, too," he said, and largely. And this largeness was his second bad mistake.

Blue Jeans had risen, and as they stood side by side, one thing was now strangely emphasized. Travel-soiled as he was, and tattered and marked with signs of conflict, Blue Jeans was the cleaner of the two, the more wholesome, and immaculate. For what *he* was stood out upon the huge man in every fold of flesh.

And Blue Jeans was at no pains to hide his distaste. He was no prude—no sissy—but somewhere every man had to draw the line. And every man should draw it before the state of his soul did such things to lips and eyes. Therefore, and because of the other's condescending largeness, his reply was cold.

"I'd better," he said, without thanks. "When a man goes into a doubtful business

he'd ought at least to dress respectable. He owes it to himself to look his best."

The level dislike in the other's tone disconcerted the huge man not at all. He was wise enough to drop it there. But it set him thinking as he retraced his way to the private car.

The fox-faced man and the reporter who was monosyllabic were waiting for his return.

"How much?" This from Fox-face, avidly. He had seen money change hands.

"Two hundred. He was stony!"

"He did look hungry." This from the reporter, ruminatingly.

"I sent him on to Larrabie."

"Bet you a hundred that Larrabie never sees him!"

"I'll take that," said the reporter.

But Fox-face, perceiving better ones, changed the terms of his proffered wager.

"Bet you a hundred you never hear from him, even if he does meet Condit." He

hurled this at the huge man, disdaining the reporter. "Bet you you've not heard from him in three years—in five!"

"There's too many sure things in this world," opined the huge man, calm under Fox-face's challenge with something like contempt, "to bother with a gamble." He squinted a moment in thought.

"But when we pull into Shell you'd better wire Larrabie to be discreet. If he wants to know who D. is, better advise Larrabie to call me 'Denver'—'Denver' Smith will do. Just a disinterested party."

And at that Fox-face was instantly, visibly consumed with curiosity. The reporter looked almost as though he understood.

"He might not approve of me," he chose to be downright, and enlighten Fox-face at the same time. "He doesn't now, as it is." And then he laughed softly, as if at himself.

"It's funny, too. I suppose he's like all of them, drunk every pay-day while his money

holds out, and a familiar face at every brothel. And yet from the way he looked at me—" He shook his head, not in anger but amiable meditation. "It's funny," he repeated, and let it go at that.

So it remained a conundrum to Fox-face. The reporter, however, was now sure that he had understood. He was sorry that he had not gone out to speak to Blue Jeans himself. And now the fat man was speaking again.

"He'll go to Estabrook, and he'll earn his two hundred. No room for doubt. But beyond that—" he shook his head. He could talk frankly to the reporter, for he never talked for publication.

"He looked honest—but it was a bad hunch, I'm afraid. I'm not so certain but what he would prove to be too honest, for any practical purpose, if he ever did come through."

"You've seen the last of him," stated Fox-face omnisciently.

But they hadn't. Blue Jeans was invisible

for a while, then he reappeared, and the water from the tank overflow had done much for man and beast. He looked almost neat, and very shining and clean. And the huge man, the reporter observed, must have been mistaken about the brothels. Blue Jeans was no prude—no sissy—but a man had to draw the line somewhere. Wherefore his lips did not puff and sag, his eyeballs were not mottled.

His neckerchief had been newly knotted, with a flourish; his discouraged boots wiped free of dust. And the mare, Girl o' Mine, had also found refreshment. She drooped no longer; she even arched her neck and buck-jumped a little, when he put his weight in the stirrup.

"You, too," he chided her, though gravely, for he was not pleased, not happy in the course to which he had committed himself. "You, too," he chided. "Oh, you brazen huzzy! There's nothing like it—nothing in all the

world like ready cash to make a female frivolous!"

He turned her across the tracks.

"We'll not linger long in Reservoir," he spoke again aloud, and the mare threw back one ear to listen. "Just long enough to eat and sleep, and then we'll start overland to Estabrook. That's sensible! That's better than squandering money on a railroad ticket."

Certainly the prospect to which he was bound irked his pride; hurt him definitely in his self-respect. But with this frugal reflection his spirits rose a little. He'd not have to be like them; he'd not mix with that clique; he'd herd alone. And save his money! That was it. There was the Dream again!

His spirits rose. With the whole train watching him he rode from sight without even putting up a hand in farewell to those at the private car windows. And at that, without realizing it, Fox-face—for that—began hating him.

Once across the tracks Blue Jeans clicked to Girl o' Mine. She swung to a canter.

"Trip along, honey," he bade her, his serenity almost restored. "Trip along, and watch your step. Remember you're bearing a capitalist!"

CHAPTER III

LITTLE-TWEED-SUIT

LITTLE-TWEED-SUIT was being bothered by a toad—a toad-person with a prominent thick watch chain and a loose smirk. She had been bothered by him ever since dinner—dinner at night at the Cactus House, which was inclined to be Eastern and effete in its apings—but his persecutions there had been confined to lurking, contrived meetings, and long glances which touched her noisomely.

Once she had swept the hotel office with a desperate glance, trying to select a face to which she might appeal. There wasn't one. Estabrook was filling with its usual week-end scum; crafty faces, hard faces, faces shallowly good-natured, and therefore doubly treacherous. Even the pimply clerk at the desk, dis-

cerning her unescorted state, had changed subtly in voice and manner.

"Alone?"

"Yes, alone."

"Lonesome?"

She had not answered him. But here on the railway platform, where she had fled to catch the East-bound, nine o'clock express, and where the toad unhurriedly had followed her; here where she had thought to fear him less she found she feared him more.

To know herself that such a thing had looked upon her as he had looked was loathsome; to have others see him accost her and leer over their interpretations of the insult seemed more than she could bear. And the platform and hot, foul waiting-room, common to both men and women, were both as conspicuous as the hotel had been; both peopled with the same side-long glances.

So she had fled again from the lighted portion of the platform this time to the darker,

far more dangerous end, which was out of the puddle of illumination. And now he was coming toward her less unhurriedly, his canine teeth showing wolfishly through a grin. This last move of hers he believed he understood; he even valued it. A little coquetry lent zest to the game. And she *had* led him a pretty chase—but now . . . he was very sure of himself . . .

How Little-Tweed-Suit—a girl like Tweed-Suit—came there upon the station platform of Estabrook is a long story; and it is not entirely hers or ours. Therefore only the briefest part, for this tale's sake, shall be set down here.

It concerns a white house on a hill, and a man who failed so bleakly that few could remember, even directly after his funeral, how shining his successes had been. For his brilliance could not be saved in ink or perpetuated with paint or brush. To be sure, his friends after his death now and then found themselves

recalling something particularly keen, something analytical and searching as a probe, which he had voiced on this occasion or that.

"I remember how Manners used to say," they would begin; and then quote as accurately as it were possible. But directly, when they discovered how happily these epigrams were received by those who had not heard them, they acquired a singular habit; they began to leave out Manners' name and appropriate the applause to themselves. Thus they robbed the dead man safely, nor found the practice ghoulish. One or two thereby even acquired permanent fame as an after-dinner wit.

Even his enemies, implacable, political enemies, who had done the most to destroy him, more than the temperament which he himself believed to be a blight, were a little more honest than that. They had fought him according to their own rules, which debarred nothing, with every foul trick they knew. If there was a weak spot in a man's record, go

after it; if he had been a weakling, temporarily a fool, seek it out. There were human bloodhounds always sniffing to come upon such a scent. Hunt it down; find the woman.

As a matter of fact, there had not been a woman, after all. That had been a mistake. A bad mistake, for it had killed his wife. But a lucky mistake for them! For it had delivered into their hands the secret of an actual and even more vulnerable place to attack.

Before his wife's death he had been proud enough to hide it, and fight it out when the struggle was on, within the four walls of his home. But afterward he seemed to cease to care.

Shameless! That was the pass to which they said he had come, in the very worthy, very tight-traditioned and not very large town in which the white house stood. And the day he rose drunk in Assembly, white, haggard drunk, they read his doom aloud. Dead politically the papers said. Fools! Dead

in hopes they should have written; dead in his debonair heart; dead sick of fighting a losing fight. And dying.

This last, the sudden death of his body, however, took them by surprise. They had not been observant. Yet on that bright day when quite as many of his political enemies as friends rode behind him, the latter were rather quick and proud to notice this. In suitably hushed voices they remarked that it proved their broad-mindedness as a community.

But whenever anything particularly crooked was being crammed through thereafter at the State Capitol, his name was sure to come up.

"It's a good thing Charlie isn't here," they'd chuckle. "We couldn't fool him this easy; he'd spot it; he'd tear us to pieces with his tongue."

His enemies were more honest; they remembered and appreciated him as an antagonist.

The others, save for the epigrammatic quotations already mentioned, were more immediately concerned with his daughter. She had been proud of her father—proud! She had never belittled him with hidden pity, not even on that night when she surprised him, all in evening black and white, immaculate and wasted, before a mirror which hung over the buffet in the dining-room. He was holding a goblet in an uplifted hand, the skin cruelly taut, though he neither swayed nor stammered.

"Your damnation, my friend," she heard him say. "Your deep damnation."

And he drank it to his reflection.

The friends were immediately concerned with the daughter. And her pride! They didn't say so, not aloud, but they thought to see it break now. And the day that Ostermoor—Young Ostermoor was his title, though his given name was Howard Davenport—broke his never announced and merely tacitly ac-

cepted engagement to her they knew great joy. But she robbed them of half their triumph. In public she never dropped her chin. And only Ostermoor and she knew the shame of that private conversation by which they were unplighted.

"You must see my predicament." So spoke Ostermoor. "I'm dependent on the old man. If he cuts me off, and he says he will if—"

Even callow young Ostermoor, hair slick and scented, a thick-limbed, small-town Brummel confident in his best-clothes smartness, had not had quite the courage to tell her to her uplifted, flushed face what his father had shouted:—That he'd have no blood of his crossed with hers; that it was dangerous blood—tainted—wild.

"He says," he finished lamely instead, "it's better to wait."

Yet how easily she read his lameness, and estimated his father's words. Dangerous blood—tainted? Ostermoor had feared her

tongue; the women in his household talked shrilly and long upon far less provocation. But she only sat and seemed to smile.

"I see," was all she said.

And while she smiled, her cheeks hot, his eyes had crept over her. Her slenderness was rounded, her slimness soft and full. A girl, it came upon him, for whom a man's arms might still yearn in spite of himself.

"This—this needn't mean any real break between us," he hoped, with what he intended as a worldly careless air. He'd never have dared that a week earlier; he had always been too conscious until that moment of a certain unapproachability, a transcendent daintiness, audacious and the reverse from fragile, which nevertheless had kept him at arms' length. But with his father's words in his ears—dangerous!—tainted!—he managed it easily.

"Of course we couldn't arrange it here in town, where we're known—"

"Arrange what?"

"Well, I thought maybe—" Her calmness, hers by right of breeding, lamed him again and angered him to coarse effrontery.

"I don't suppose there's many in town now who'd care to take a chance—"

"A chance on what?"

"Well, on marrying you. This is a pretty conservative community. But I thought if we could find a place quietly, not too far away, where we—"

She rang a bell and summoned a butler who was also cook, and coachman too.

"Show Mr. Ostermoor out," she directed, calm still. But the terms of that order were only out of regard for the extreme age of the servitor. He would attempt to obey her she knew; had he been younger she would have directed that Mr. Ostermoor be thrown out.

A week later the estate was settled up. Naturally Ostermoor's father, who was president of the local bank, knew that there wasn't going to be any estate, yet the total of her

father's paper must have staggered him. I hope so. And when she was proved to be practically penniless, immediately they all felt that they had evened their score with her. For what? Oh, for driving so sweet and cool along a dusty, maple-shaded main street, as pleasant and courteous to ordinary tradespeople as she was to better folk.

Then, in a surprisingly short while, whenever somebody happened to mention her and wonder where she had gone, they found that they had already started to forget her.

"Somewhere West. I did hear the name of the place. But I can't remember it."

They were above reproach,—in their geography. She had gone somewhere west, and sometimes I am not sure that there isn't a heartache in the reason for her going.

Romance was in her hungry heart; such romance as the Sunday-groomed youths who frequented the house on the hill might never satisfy. She'd read books, all sorts of books,

but one of the plains she loved. In it a somewhat saturnine horseman, a son of the sagebrush, unlettered but tutored much by life, had wooed and won a prim little schoolmistress from the East. Whether she went with the hope of emulation in her heart or not none can venture to say. Maybe it was in search of manhood, a different kind of man.

Anyhow, she went. And found a school to teach. And disillusionment. She could not teach school; she knew more than her scholars, yet not so much more of what they needed to be taught. It was not always clear in her mind whether it had been the Delaware or the Rappahannock which furnished Washington's transportation problem. And two and two didn't always make four; not if she didn't keep her mind terribly concentrated, when she wanted to dream.

The children loved her; they cried, unaccountably to their parents, when she had to leave. But the parents were ruthless about

it; they weren't paying school taxes to support a slip of a girl who couldn't hammer the three essential R's into their undoubtedly gifted offsprings' heads, even though her hair was high-piled and tawny-red, and her skin like cream; even though there were violet lights in her singularly eager eyes.

When one less practical than the rest tried to point out that she had a bearing different from theirs; "genteel" he called it, yet without offense to the most humble, and that she "talked good, too," and in a less nasal way, they rode him down. Their progeny was yet a long step from a drawing-room they averred, or the need to know how to enter one.

She lost her position. In Estabrook, loath to acknowledge herself disappointed, she found another, and lost that. But she considered this scarcely a mishap, for she couldn't have lived upon what it paid anyway. Moreover she was becoming rapidly afraid of this country; it was bigger and she was littler than

she had supposed. And no dashing horsemen had ridden up to her schoolhouse door and handed her nosegays and assured her that her eyes were the same shade of blue. She'd pricked that bubble! Most of them chewed tobacco with no delicate regard for outward appearances.

With her money running perilously low she had taken stock of her wardrobe and found it already shabby, and decided to go back East while there was still time. She'd try New York. Her pride would not handicap her there any more than it had here, for no one would know her. She'd find something to do in New York; of course she would. She'd have to!

Then the toad-person had laid unclean eyes upon her in the dining-room of the Cactus House, and contrived meetings where their bodies must brush close in passing. And followed her to the station. And she was biting her lip now to keep from being silly and

screaming; trying to plan in panic the scathing things which she must say.

It was dark there. The toad could not see her face and thus learn that her eyes were dilated. The East-bound roared in as he came up. She tried to run—it was her train—and couldn't. The toad put a hand upon her. And then Blue Jeans—blue serge now—dropped off the steps of the smoker in the shadow close behind her, and became instantly absorbed in the tableau.

Blue Jeans had whipped Condit. Indeed, he had considered it an unfair thing. Why, Condit was only a boy—not more than twenty-one or twenty-two at the most—a baby!—no bigger than himself. Not half so big as the superintendent! And he could not fight well, either. He danced a lot, and feinted, and made a great show of annihilation, but he couldn't really fight. Blue Jeans had been sorry for him a little; not much, because he'd ought to be in some other business if he

couldn't take care of himself. But he'd dropped so still, the first time Blue Jeans hit him. So huddled like!

"Have I killed him?" he asked Larrabie, remorsefully, after it had happened.

Condit had folded up like a sick accordion.

"Have I killed him?"

"Hell, no!" And Larrabie had stared curiously while neither of them heard the applause.

Before an hour passed Larrabie wired the huge man who had an office in New York, an office lined with books. The books were never used; the office saw strange usage.

"A bear-cat," Larrabie wired. "What shall I do with him?"

And an answer had come back:

"Keep him under cover. Work him a little. Will send Devereau when the time is right."

So Blue Jeans had suddenly found his Dream in the process of coming true. For he

had done, not happy at heart, just what the huge man had said he would do; he had decided to accumulate other and just as easy two hundreds.

"I'll herd by myself," was the way he argued himself to this decision. "I'm no lily, but I'll not soil myself worse with this bunch."

And Larrabie had kept him under cover, and worked him twice, until another telegram had finally come, advising them that Devereau was on his way West,—that the "time was right." But Larrabie had been perplexed again on this occasion by Blue Jeans' lack of enthusiasm. He reread the telegram aloud and emphasized the other's great luck.

"There's not a man that wouldn't give up a big slice to get him for a manager," he said. "He's in right, too. He's the ace!"

"Huh!" remarked Blue Jeans. Indeed, Blue Jeans baffled him.

And when Devereau arrived in Estabrook on a train twenty minutes late, Blue Jeans

was not there to keep the appointment which Larrabie, duly aware of the Easterner's importance, had arranged.

"Devereau'll be taking you East, likely," he had surmised. So waiting not an instant past the hour when he was scheduled to arrive, Blue Jeans had gone, stricken with homesickness at the thought of leaving her, to see Girl o' Mine. It took him twenty miles down the line, but he'd made the appointment with her before he knew Devereau was coming, anyhow, and he'd keep it. Therefore Devereau—but you've guessed it. Devereau is Fox-face of the private car. Devereau is the toad.

It was dark at the end of the platform. He could not see that her eyes were dilated. He laid his hand upon her. She couldn't run; her legs felt frozen and useless.

"No hurry, dearie," said Devereau. "Let's talk this over. Maybe you'll be glad you missed your train."

But Blue Jeans, who had landed lightly on the gravel, saw what Devereau had missed. He saw that Tweed-Suit was afraid—that she was numbed with fear. His single back-hand thrust sent Devereau spinning under a truck.

"Your train?"

"Yes."

"Give me your bag."

She obeyed him. They had told her that the train did not wait very long. His hand found her arm, a different touch than Devereau's.

"Now run," he ordered.

They found most of the vestibules already closed; then one far down still open. So they made it, though he had to toss the bag and fairly lift her on. And it was done so swiftly that it was a full half minute before she caught her breath.

"Oh, thank you!" she exclaimed then.

The porter was fussing with her bag, and

her fervor overwhelmed him. But her next words were a shock.

"I—I want to get off," she blurted.

The porter shook his head; he had expected better from her, but all women were riddles.

"We's rolling now, ma'am," he answered. "No stop for two hundred miles."

That night Cecille Manners—Tweed-Suit will no longer serve—lay in her berth and watched the stars reel by. She had misjudged the west and come away too soon; she knew that now. She put her hand upon her arm. No, that wasn't the way it had felt; it had been strong, infallible. And though he had turned quickly away, after putting her aboard; though she had no way of guessing that he had gone back to find Devereau, she was filled just the same with what remained, for a long time at least, a happy certainty. She'd see him again sometime. She had to!

But Devereau had known better than to linger near the baggage truck. So after he

had looked beneath it and upon it and all around it and found nobody, Blue Jeans turned and watched the red tail-light of the train disappear.

Who shall say where fancy first was bred? Not you—or I—nor even Blue Jeans. For he had not even seen her yet, not with seeing eyes. Here was yet no chapter of his Dream.

"A decent girl!" was what he muttered. "A decent girl—I'd swear it!"

And he looked again, eagerly, beneath the truck.

An hour later when Blue Jeans heard a man asking for Perry Blair in the Cactus House, he stepped up. He didn't care for his looks, which was no novelty so far in this venture.

"I'm Perry Blair," he said.

"I'm Devereau."

And later, over a contract:

"This mentions mighty little money," said Perry, "and that little bashful and meek."

Perry's manner did not even approximate

the respect which Devereau felt was his due.

"You'll be well taken care of," he stated curtly.

But Perry's answer, like one he had made the huge man, made Devereau pause and think.

"No doubt at all," said he. "I'll be seeing to that myself."

And they didn't know, not till a long time afterward, that they had met only a little while before. It had been dark at the platform's end. Perry had caught nothing save a canine grin.

CHAPTER IV

All Else Is Heresy

THERE are certain people, good people to whom orthodox precepts and preachments are more than the constant evidence of their own eyes, who will find displeasure in this story. For they are accustomed to a formula in all such tales and are not likely to abide a departure from it.

By it they have come to know immediately, whenever a woman with instincts of doubtful propriety is introduced early in the action, just what to expect. Her doom has struck. The frightful end which will be hers is only a deferred matter still in the hands of her historian: The dark river, a rushing car over an embankment to swift oblivion, a living agony of remorse,—the rewards it will be noted bear a distinct resemblance each to the other. For

the wages of sin have long been classified, tabulated and fixed, a minimum of mercy, a maximum of disaster. All else is heresy.

They have been told this so many times that they not only believe it, just as Cecille Manners once believed, utterly, fervidly, but they derive therefrom an ardent satisfaction. This might seem strange, but it is stranger far that they never look about them, just for a moment, at life itself—just for a moment, just long enough to wonder. But they do not. They believe in and expect the worst, demand it indeed. And so this story will not please them—no. Not at all in so far as it chronicles the life of Felicity Brown.

But the other half, the half which has been wondering for quite a while, just as Cecille came to wonder, may read it and approve.

Once it was considered adequate to combat wickedness with fear, but methods change. It has come to seem wiser, if less orthodox, to urge that heaven is fair instead of insisting

first that hell is so foul. And so perhaps it would be well for a change to bear less heavily upon the wages of sin, and extol, just a little, the wages of virture. For too constant insistence upon an evil thing is sure to breed doubt in the mind of one who is in the habit of thinking at all. It did in Cecille's. If it be so true, so inevitable, so frightful, surely it should be self-evident now and then, instead of a mere matter of report. And beautiful generalization, never anything but vague, becomes noticeable after a time, questionable. The things of glory in this world are not so tediously many that they will not bear once or twice the telling. Why not refuse, for once, to blink the facts, even though they may not be suitably sordid? Why not go into detail, once in a while, if the prospect is as fair as they would have one fancy?

This story does, I hope. It would be honester that way.

* * * * * *

It is not easy to account for the intimacy which existed between those two girls. It is doubtful if either of them could have done much to account for it. Pressed for an explanation, Felicity Brown, it is true, might have essayed an answer of sorts. "Oh, Cele's kind of a nut," she might have declared, "but she's a good scout," or something equally unsatisfactory. But Cecille, unless urged, quite likely wouldn't have made any answer at all. Then, "I don't know," she would have murmured. And in the face of such gravity her inquisitor must surely have sought a different topic.

Yet the intimacy was a fact,—one of those odd facts which life persists in producing. They had shared an apartment (that is a nice compliment, that phrase, applied to their sitting-room, bedroom and bath) for almost a year, continuing in a state of amiability possible only between two people so widely separated in ideals and hopes that there could

never be a clash. There had never been much companionship, however. Now and then they ate one meal together, an early dinner for Cecille and a late breakfast for Felicity, at six o'clock in the evening. For Cecille's working day was over before Felicity's began. But there had been no intimacy of the spirit. And yet each knew the soul of the other as well as though it had been a meal sack which could be turned inside out, exposing every seam to scrutiny.

Felicity Brown belonged to the Midnight Roof Club's famous Aero Octet. That is, of course, a needless bit of information, presumptuous even to the initiate, for everybody knows her, almost everybody. She was the third from the left, the one in new-grass green, with balloons pendant from the scalloped corners of her short, stiff-wired skirt —black balloons like huge dull pearls. The one with the smile. Yes, I know that the others smiled, too, constantly, provocatively;

but sometimes the set of their lips was likely to seem anything but the curl of mirth. But not Felicity's.

It never lost its challenge. And her dancing was like that, tireless, serenely abandoned, the essence of knowing grace. Half-pagan, half-divine, Denby, the young cover artist, badly smitten, once put it with striking unoriginality. And with exceeding inaccuracy, too. For there are all too many who will insist that the pagan portion rather over-balanced the rest. But her sheer vitality was amazing.

An unobserving person, still seeking the key to their intimacy, could easily blunder upon the old bromide and repeat that a pretty woman invariably prefers a plain one for a foil. But he would have to be a very blind fool indeed. For Felicity Brown's beauty, perfect enough under the spot of the Midnight Club's miniature stage, became a less flawless thing in contrast with Cecille. Per-

haps that sounds far-fetched. Perhaps, having seen Felicity for yourself, you are inclined to smile and shrug. Nevertheless it is so.

Not one of a million Denbys would ever have called Cecille half-pagan or divine in any degree. He wouldn't have noticed her, even, unless his attention had been pointedly called that way. And if another, contemplating her with an eye not greedy of the flesh alone, had finally hit upon the word poignant to describe the hungry youth of her, the odd little tilt of her head, the soft and eager promise in swelling line of hip and breast, Denby himself most certainly would have murmured absently:

"Poignant. Yes—yes, poignant. Quite so—quite so!"

And yawned.

For she did not challenge instantly, as did Felicity. A man might look at her a long time before her perfection smote him. It

usually happened that way; it happened exactly like that to Perry Blair. He looked at her many, many times before he saw with seeing eyes and realized how shyly precious and flagrantly bold girlhood like hers could be.

Her smile was not as ready as that of the girl who danced. And it had become a little strained, a little edged, before the end. But it never lost its freshness. It was always as shining as fine rain at dawn. And the inquiry in her eyes was not part calculation. They were more wistful, less expectant maybe. But they were steady. And gray as a November sea.

Once, remarking the incongruity of their names, Cecille repeated her own with a shade of scorn and provoked from her companion one of the few personalities in which she ever indulged.

"Cecille Manners!" she drawled. "Cecille Manners—gown-fitter's assistant! With a

name like that I should be in a Broadway chorus."

It happened late one evening. Cecille was half undressed for bed. And Felicity, busy at the mirror, turned an instant to follow with a dispassionate eye the slight, knickered figure crossing the room.

"With a figure like that, you mean," she amended. "It's plain stingy to keep it under cover. Think of the thousands who are panting to pass over three-fifty per, just to sit out front and give it the up and down!"

Nor did the girl at the mirror see the raw flush which her cool comment brought to Cecille's face, nor would she have understood it had she seen. That one's privacy, one's physical fastidiousness, could be affronted by mere words, would have astounded her. Fastidiousness carried that far—fastidiousness of any sort—was incomprehensible to Felicity. But she found the topic momentarily of interest.

"It is kind of stagy," she pursued it. "Your own?"

"Naturally."

Cecille's crispness was lost upon her. They could never have quarreled. And Cecille had found a dressing-gown and hugged it tight around her knees.

"Oh, not necessarily," Felicity said, abstractedly judicious. "Take me for instance. I tried out four or five before I was inspired with the one I'm wearing now. And a couple of them woulda knocked you dead, take it from me. But the Vere de Vere stuff is bla now. Too phony. There's no class to that kind of a monicker any more. And, believe me, you can't afford to overlook any bets, nowadays; you got to have class in everything. Something simple—something demure, that's what they want. You got to be a lady."

And perhaps that is the best explanation, after all, of Felicity's cultivation of the other girl. One cannot of oneself acquire breeding,

but it is possible to study technique. And I think Cecille's reason for sticking to Felicity to the very end is clear too. Once, before things happened, she was one of those people who believed in the inevitable dark river, or swift oblivion, or an agony of remorse. Believed pathetically.

I think Felicity Brown served her as a fearsome revelation of life stripped to its rawest essentials,—a demonstration of shattering truths which she would never have believed had she not stood by, looking on. It held her as a snake's eye holds a bird, fascinated, in deadly peril.

But they got on together. And as an economic arrangement it left nothing to be desired. Cecille sewed well and was paid twenty-two fifty a week. For her appearance in the Aero Octet Felicity received, at the beginning, forty-five. This may astonish some. It shouldn't.

"I don't pay my girls much." So Fiegen-

spann, the proprietor of the Roof Club, bluntly advised her, after she had passed his scrutiny and been pronounced unusual enough even for the Aero Octet. "I don't have to. Because the opporchoonities here are big—very big. And I like my girls to be sociable. It makes business."

Felicity knew then that she had finally found the right man—the right market. She appreciated his frankness and reciprocated.

"I get you," she said, "and forty-five it is. And I'm sociable, or I can be, if sufficiently persuaded. Only let's be clear about that point right now, at the start. You can send Opporchoonity's card in whenever he calls and I'll be pleased to meet him. But he mustn't crawl up to the curb in any Decrepid Four—understand? He's got to be hitting on twelve."

Fiegenspann understood. He nodded his heavy head. He began to see, then and there, that Felicity Brown was going to add another

page to the Roof Club's history. He even essayed a compliment.

"My clientele is of all the world," he said. "And you—you look expensif."

"I am," said Felicity. "No pikers need apply."

And with that business conference between Felicity and Fiegenspann began the revelation which during the months that followed Cecille watched in a kind of stricken suspense that must, it seems, have been childish anticipation in the beginning of the pitiless blast which would complete the other's sure destruction.

Since the day when freakish chance had thrown them together she had had no illusions concerning Felicity's ultimate destiny. It had surprised her not that Felicity was traveling the road, but that she had not long since arrived. She had not learned then how coolly Felicity herself had selected that destiny and taken it in hand. She had not sur-

mised with what dispassionate judgment she had husbanded her resources, once the route was chosen.

And she wouldn't believe the evidence of her own eyes and ears, at first. It never happened this way—it couldn't! Such things were the black fruit of one reckless moment; of nameless impulses; of bitter betrayal. Someone had written something like that. One more unfortunate, rashly importunate—that was it. She couldn't remember the rest. And then her suspense, which was half fearsome expectancy, was overwhelmed by a thought which really frightened her.

If all that they had taught her wasn't so; if all that she had accepted so blindly wasn't the literal truth, inexorable for every individual (life was a too bitterly personal thing for her to concern herself with a doctrine which, accurate in the main, could be shrugged aside when it failed in isolated cases) then all the rest, all that she had clung

to just as blindly, could be a lie. And if it was —if it was—

The thought struck at all she knew, all she had, her creed and code and hope of to-morrow.

Felicity when she burst in with the news that she had landed Fiegenspann did a wild can-can up and down the room. She danced as no one else ever saw her dance, in a surrender to exultation that was wanton savagery. But her mood passed quickly. The next moment, like an implacable campaigner, she was summing up the excellences of her latest step.

"Now you watch me!" she said. "Now you watch my dust!"

It was cold-blooded; it was as passionless as chess. And it was about then that Cecille began to draw nearer and nearer in spirit, like a bird hypnotized by a snake. The simile is hectic, I know. But it was like that.

She tried to hold aloof. She used to wonder why she had not packed her bag that night

and got out. She used to shiver when she remembered Felicity's dance. One couldn't touch pitch and not be defiled. There were, it seemed, an overwhelming number of such proverbs, and most of them forbidding.

But she stayed on. More than that, she found herself after a time stammering a question concerning each new cavalier as he appeared. And each time Felicity's answer was unbelievably unconcerned and laconic.

"Nothing doing," she'd say. "He's hard boiled."

Familiarity breeds complacency oftener than contempt. But it was neither the one nor the other which forced Cecille to ask, over and over again. Once Felicity surprised in her eyes the light that invariably accompanied the question.

"You're a queer kid," she added that time, after the usual answer. "I sure don't get you."

Later she thought she had solved it.

"Don't you worry, Cele," she reassured her. "When the fall comes you'll hear the crash. I'll slip you the returns a little ahead of time so that you can get out from under."

"It—it wasn't that," protested Cecille quickly.

She wondered why she didn't pack up and get out.

But she was still there another night when Felicity finally came home again with every lithe line of her body pulsing triumph. She was even sitting up, which was unusual. An unusual occurrence accounted for it.

In the beginning Felicity had tried to share with the other girl those prospects who, for one reason or another, were of no importance.

"Come on along," she often urged. "These guys mean nothing in my young life except a dinner. And you needn't worry. Believe me, you'll be shown the same respect as if you were out with your maiden aunt. They know

I'm refined and won't stand for anything else. And it'll do you good."

Cecille did go, once. So far as her escort was concerned she found that Felicity had spoken the truth. He was innocuous. He was, indeed, quite entirely unaware of her presence most of the evening. That did not displease her. She found him little stupider than a swain of the same age might have been in her own home town, even though his name did appear in heavy block type in the Social Register. But she went only once. She made a mistake. She had that day helped to costume a sister of one of the men. She happened now to mention that sister's prettiness.

The man looked her in the eye, coldly, for a prolonged moment.

"Let's leave my sister out of it," he said at length deliberately.

And Cecille's cheeks were still pale from his tone when they arrived back at the apartment.

"That was a bad crack you made," Felicity told her then.

"I—I didn't know."

"They don't like to discuss their own womenfolks with girls like us."

"Oh!"

The exclamation was little more than a whisper.

"But no harm done," airily. "He has to depend on the old man for his bank-roll. I just thought I'd tip you off."

She didn't go again. She stopped wanting to go anywhere, even to the movies, for quite a while. And then, just at eleven one night, while Felicity was before the mirror preparing to go to work and wondering where Cecille could be, the latter came quietly in. Felicity hardly marked her entrance until she dropped suddenly into a chair and began to laugh. It was the laugh which made Felicity turn so sharply. She had had experience with that shrill note in women's voices and

knew what it could mean. Such breakdowns were ugly to handle.

She flung sharply round.

"What's tickling you?" she barked harshly. "Shoot! Let's have it. Cut that, now!"

It stayed the slighter girl's hysteria.

"I've been—I've been to a dance," she gurgled.

Felicity gave her no foolish respite.

"Well, I don't get it," she rapped on. "Maybe I'm English. Where's the joke?"

"A—a dance over at the Central Palace, given for Worthy Working Girls—"

"That's funnier! But go ahead. Snap into it! Don't let it drag—don't let it drag—"

It seemed a potent cure.

"I went because I saw in the paper that Mrs. Schuyler Driggs was going to be among the patronesses to receive."

The hysterical giggle was gone from Cecille's voice. She shut tight her teeth and raised her chin. Felicity felt that it was safe

now to remain silent. And she was right, partly right. She only failed to realize that Cecille was all too calm.

"I'm sorry, Felicity," the latter apologized meekly. "But I couldn't help it. I thought I'd laugh and cry and scream, right on the street, before I could get here. But I held on. Shall I finish?"

"Mrs. Schuyler Driggs has just made her entrance—"

"Yes. She was in the shop this morning." The recital seemed simple and orderly now. "I helped to fit her. I usually do. She's never very cordial, but this morning she was—oh, she was a beast! She nagged and nagged and nagged, until I got nervous. I couldn't help it. I got worse and worse, until I stuck a pin into her. Not just a scratch." The gurgle threatened. "But deep—deep!"

"If you go off again," promised Felicity, "I'll dump that pitcher of water over you."

"I won't. I stuck the pin into her, and

she—she grunted. And then—I never saw anyone grow so furious. She turned purple. I'm not sure that she didn't strike at me.

"'You did that on purpose,' she grated at me. Grated, that's the only word that describes it. 'You fool! You damned clumsy little fool!'"

Felicity waited until it was evident that she would have to speak.

"Well?" she asked then in a voice grown hard. "What did *you* say? What was the snappy come-back?"

"I couldn't think of anything to say, not just then—"

"Folks like you usually can't," said Felicity drily. "They think of a knock-out a half an hour too late. But not me. Language comes easy to me in a spot like that, language that I can't use regular without getting pinched, and I'm generous with it."

"I was a little more than a half hour late in having my say," Cecille admitted. "But

I had it. I saw the announcement of the dance in the afternoon paper and her name, and I decided to go. I don't know why; that is, I didn't—not until she recognized me. Then I knew! She was shaking hands with me and telling me to have a good time. She was just passing me on to the next in line, when she blinked at me, like that—she's fat—and stopped me.

" 'Haven't I seen you somewhere before, my dear?' she asked. 'You seem somehow very familiar.'

"Then I knew why I'd come. And I let her have it!

" 'You have,' I was just as throaty as she was. 'And I should be,'—meaning familiar. 'At ten-thirty o'clock this morning when I stuck a pin into you, fitting that gown you have on, you cursed me. If I remember accurately you called me a damned clumsy little fool.' "

"—seven—eight—nine—ten!" chanted Fe-

5787528

licity joyously. "And *out!* What did she do?"

And then, quite without any warning at all, came the break. It was like the shattering of brittle glass.

Cecille rocked to crazy mirth.

"She had them put me out!" she shouted. "She called the matron and had her put me out! She said the language I'd used before her was positively vicious. She said I'd — contaminate — those — worthy — working girls!"

And it took Felicity almost three-quarters of an hour to bring her round. In one brief interval of calm she managed to slip to the telephone and call a taxi. The rest of the time she spent on her knees beside the girl in the chair crooning softly. And she never knew that most of the words she set to her soothing, extemporaneous tune would have contaminated anybody, most of all Mrs. Schuyler Driggs herself.

At eleven-thirty, when Cecille was crying comfortably, she rose. And seeing that her work was well done, she became brisk.

"I'll get a bawling out from Fiegenspann," she said, and ran to a window. "Thank God, that taxi's here. And now you'd better get to bed. Maybe hereafter you'll know better than to mix it with somebody outa your class. You oughta known in the first place that perfect ladies have got it all over girls like us, before we start. They've got everything fixed, the judges and the referee, before you step into the ring."

She ran out—and flashed back.

"Don't get me wrong, Cele." For one reason or another she hurried it. "I ain't got time to explain just what I meant to say, but there's one thing I didn't mean. Don't get me wrong. If you ain't a lady, then I'm the Prince of Wales."

That was the second time Cecille heard it.

"A girl like us."

After a time her sobs subsided until they were no more than long, unsteady breaths. But she stayed at the window, staring down into the street. Once she dug the knuckles of one fist into her eyes and wistfully shook her head.

"I wonder," she whispered. "I wonder."

CHAPTER V

CHAMPION! CHAMPION!

PERRY BLAIR, champion lightweight of the world, stood on the corner of Broadway and Forty-fourth Street, deep in contemplation of a quaint phase of our present-day democracy.

It was a fertile spot for such moralizing, albeit somewhat exposed for one attempting philosophy in a fall-weight overcoat. For nowhere in all this world could one hope to come upon a crowd better schooled in the rules of hero-worship, American-style, than this eleventh-hour mob which was pouring like tide-rips from side-street theaters into the city's main thoroughfare.

Much has been written, of a distinctly pathetic flavor, concerning the case of a king without a throne. From days immemorial

such hapless figures have been somehow invested by historians with a melancholy glamour; and yet this appears to be true only of those royal individuals who came by their thrones in the easiest way—that of inheritance. The kings of high endeavor who have won to the pinnacle by force of their own stoutness of heart—in other words the popular idols of a fickle public, who have scarce begun to get acquainted with the dizzy uncertainty of their pedestals before the pedestal be rudely removed from beneath them—rarely find the world inclined to melancholy interest in their plight. Ridicule is the commonest manifestation of any interest whatsoever, ridicule and an unfathomable contempt.

For some time Perry Blair had been finding this hard to understand. The adulation had been so overwhelming at first, so wholehearted and seeming sincere one brief year before. Why, even six months back he could

not have stood there thus, a tenth as long, before the copper name-shield of the Claridge, without collecting about him a fawning, favor-hunting throng so dense, so tenacious, and troublesome to traffic that it would have brought the officer from his place beside the surface-car tracks, caustic-tongued, to investigate and disperse it. Nor would that officer have ordered them to move on, six months before, once he had discovered what monarch it was who held informal court there. He would have paused for a bluff joke or two himself, a knowing word of importance, before returning to loose his indignation upon some luckless wight of a family man, self-conscious and clumsy in what is known as a tin lizzie.

They had hailed him so noisily, so elatedly, press and public alike. That the latter had fawned and flattered should have warned him what to expect, later on, but it did not. The greater wonder is that it did not go to his

head a little. It seemed it couldn't help but do that.

It had been so sudden. Mediocrity one day, and obscurity. Mediocrity—and then world's champion, and the fierce white light which beats upon a throne! Of course there had been some to sneer. Here and there one had arisen to point out that Fanchette, the man whom he had whipped in one round, had been but a shell of a man, champion in name only, for a long, long time. They said the victory proved nothing. They said that Perry Blair had just been lucky, that was all; lucky in being selected as the one least calculated to damage Fanchette after a whole year in which the latter had steadfastly refused to fight. Lucky in having that fox, Devereau, for a manager, cunning enough to decoy Fanchette into the ring.

But in the main they swarmed to his standard. The king was dead. And he had lingered tediously, at that.

The newspapers welcomed Perry avidly. Fanchette as a subject for copy had long been profitless as a sucked orange. Here again was the novelty of newness and a personality of exceeding richness and color. Or at least so ran report. No crack men had been sent out to cover the affair. That such an astounding thing as the rise of a new champion threatened had been foreseen by few. In the East Perry Blair had been little known and reckoned a third-rater. But those who had been West to see the bout which ended so suddenly brought back fragments which put a nice edge upon the imaginations of the sporting editors. And immediately, when in reality there was no need, had begun the well-known process of gilding the lily.

They featured his out-of-doors life; the romance of the country boy again. They dwelt upon his modesty, his extreme reticence, his hardihood and rigid habit of clean living. They twanged all the strings

that had ever sounded before in honor of other champions. And Broadway—that certain ring which can give you off-hand the exact poundage of Nelson when he met Gans, or the fastest time in which the Futurity has ever been run, or the name of the latest female whose intimate measurements have just been declared by one of a half dozen greatest living artists to be a reproach to the Venus de Milo, all without wrinkling its forehead in thought—that portion of Broadway, to use its own expression, ate it up.

And yet when Perry Blair came East an odd thing happened. When he came East and they found that every word which they had read with such approval was the literal truth, and not just the industry of an astute press-agent, they were nonplused. Even suspicious, I believe. And outraged in the end.

It must have been a shock to them to find in Perry Blair a sportsman, when they had

expected a dead game sport. They had been waiting to lay at his feet (at a price) the spoils due a conqueror, spoils neither savory nor shining, but those which other champions had demanded and relished, until they waked to find themselves champion no more. And when Blair ignored these things they distrusted him.

From the outset his reticence, which had been lauded, nettled them. By some obscure process of reasoning it convicted him of conceit, a mean and stingy conceit, unpardonable even among those to whom self-esteem was as natural as the drawing of breath. Eternal poseurs themselves, they adjudged his modesty a pose, yet somehow could not forgive it. And his decency bred hatred in a few.

The growth of antagonism was too slow, too intricate, to be retraced here. It is effect and not cause with which we are concerned. And one instance alone will serve to show how finally was wrecked that popularity

which had been so swiftly created. One interview between Perry and Devereau explains it well.

The reply which Perry Blair made to the invitation sent him several months after his arrival in Manhattan, by Pig-Iron Dunham, is still verbal currency upon the Tenderloin. Conversational small change, to be sure, but still in circulation.

Dunham had bidden him to one of his famous little dinners. Infamous? Well, it's all in the point of view. Some of them have been spoken of warmly by those who have attended, though guardedly.

Perry Blair was more outspoken.

"Tell Dunham," he directed the messenger who had brought the invitation quite privately, "tell Dunham that if it had to be one or the other I'd chose to dine decently with a four-footed hog, in a trough."

The messenger, one of many who believed that Pig-Iron Dunham, having amassed

millions in the industry which had given him his name, was a philanthropist in spending it so liberally, thought to have heard wrong. So Perry repeated again for him the message with something added for emphasis. This time he believed his ears and bore it as nearly intact as possible to Dunham. And when hours later it came word for word to Devereau, the latter turned pale. For many days he had been hearing rumors disturbing to his ideas of managerial authority, but had laid them to jealousy. He believed them now. He sought out Blair.

"Listen!" He plunged strongly in. He thought he knew when to tread softly, when to brow-beat. "Listen, kid! You've pulled a boner. A'course I shoulda wised you up earlier about Dunham but I thought you were on. I thought everybody was. But you can't treat Pig-Iron this way. Why—why—why he—he's—"

What he had wanted to say was that Dun-

ham, Benevolent Patron of the Street, was not accustomed to having his favors rebuffed so crudely, but he couldn't quite manage it. So he fell back upon earnest repetition.

"You can't treat him like this!"

"Can't?" asked Perry Blair. "I just have."

Devereau didn't like that tone. He was just discovering a lot of things about his lightweight champion which he didn't like. But he kept his temper. He was famed for that. Famed for his oily smoothness under provocation.

"Sure! Your mistake—and my fault. But it ain't too late to square it," he said. "You just send over word that you'll be pleased to death to be at his dinner, and it'll still be all right. I'll square it. And don't you worry. You won't be bored. Pig-Iron's dinners are—now—well—" He closed an obscene lid. "A good time will be had by all! And Pig-Iron will be pleased to have

you there. Pig-Iron, he likes to entertain the latest celebrities."

Blair's voice made him start.

"He can't entertain me," said Perry. "Not a little bit."

And suddenly with that Devereau was suave no longer. He leaped up and thumped upon a desk. He slitted his pale eyes.

"Say, what d'yuh think you are?" he raved. "Talking to me like that!"

Blair did not attempt to shout him down, and yet he made himself heard.

"Not Pig-Iron Dunham's man," he answered. "Nor yet yours. Are you thinking to tell me how I shall talk?"

Devereau could not have told why his rage was so red. Why he hated the other so swiftly. But he mastered his voice. He had seen something like this coming, not so unpleasant, however, or so difficult to handle. He had imagined when the time came they would talk it over, amicably, like good busi-

ness men. But that was out of the question now. It had always been out of the question, but he'd realized that tardily. But they'd have it out. There could be no better time.

"No?" he drawled. "No?" Sarcasm lent his words a sing-song quality.

"No? Not Dunham's man? Not mine? Well-well! Ha-ha!"

And then, savagely:

"So that's it! It's true, heh? They been trying to tell me so for weeks, all up and down the line, and I been telling 'em they'd got you wrong. The swelled head, is it? But pardon me, Mr. Blair. Who am I to speak thus to the world's champion? Delusions of grandeur, I should say. Pardon my coarseness!" Sudden laughter split wide his lips.

"Champion!" he bawled. "World's champion! Oh, my Gawd!"

Perry sat silent and watched him. Little by little he recognized that this was not

acting. This was real. He waited and watched.

"So you been followin' the papers, Mr. Blair," chanted Devereau. Having struck this vein of satire and found it rich he followed it up. "Full of lovely reading these days, now aren't they?"

That was not so; not as it was meant. Perry had found the columns devoted to himself singularly flat and devoid of interest. There was only one item, in fact, which never failed. Only one which he always read, the daily quotation on livestock. But he kept quiet. His eyes alone were attentive.

"So you've been reading the papers!" Mincingly Devereau went back and picked it up. "Well-well! Ha-ha!" But hard after came again that half-blind, half-incoherent rage.

"Listen, now, you! You listen! Listen, and I'll give you an interview that's never been put on any press."

And he gave it to him, briefly, coldly. He repeated substantially what the carpers had said at the time Perry won the title.

"Champion?" he said. "Sure—because I made you champion. Because Fanchette wouldn't a'stepped into the ring with Jimmy Montague, or Jigger Holliday; no, nor even old Kid Fall. I know, believe me I know, because I tried him with all of 'em. Not for the purse that was offered. He wasn't looking to commit suicide at bargain prices.

"But you? He'd take a chance on you. Sure he would. Who the hell was Perry Blair, anyway? He knew that Montague'd cut him to pieces. Holliday'd have tore off his lid. So I swung him to you.

"And why? Because I thought you'd listen to reason. Oh, you don't believe it. Ask Dunham. Are you still such a hick that you don't know he was behind that match? Why, he's behind 'em all—nine tenths of 'em. His bankroll is."

"Whose right hand was it put Fanchette out?" asked Perry mildly.

"Pah!" slurred Devereau. "Pah! I coulda done it myself."

But Blair's quietness fooled him.

"I'm not saying that it wasn't convincing." He thought it time to placate. "It was neat. I've gave you credit. Sure! You looked great. You looked like a world-beater, in there against Fanchette. But that's just what I'm trying to get at. Oh, Dunham and I talked it over before anybody in this burg knew you were alive. That's what I'm trying to get at. You been crabbin' your own act; you been making it hard for yourself. You gotta play it up now. You gotta work different.

"Nowadays a champ has just two outs. He's got to be a glad hand artist, or a bruiser. That covers it. He's either got to be so popular that they don't care much who he fights, so long as he's a good showman, or he's got

to take them all on as they come. All the hard ones, and the harder the better, till one of 'em puts him to sleep."

Devereau's voice acquired a whine, the plaintive note of a man whose sincere best efforts have gone unappreciated.

"And I had it all figured out. I been doing all the headwork for you. I figured how we'd sidestep Montague and Holliday—all the tough birds—just as long as we could stall 'em off. And pick up a nice piece of change. Your share'd be enough so's you'd not need to worry. And we'd made a great start. They were dead sick of Fanchette. The papers were wild for somebody new. And they put you over better'n we could have done it ourselves.

"But you gotta work different. They liked you at first. They ain't so dead sure they give a damn about you now. You gotta be a good boy. More of a mixer. The crowd has been waitin' a long time for you

to loosen up and slip 'em a piece of news that can be cashed. And they're getting sulky. A'course that's my fault too. I admit it. But it couldn't be helped. There wasn't much you coulda tipped 'em off to, but you shoulda stalled 'em along. You should have promised 'em something when the time was right. But it's right now, now that you're matched with Hughie. You can tell 'em just how to get aboard. It's time, before some of 'em get good and sore, and begin to holler for you to meet Montague."

"I can whip Montague," said Perry. "Holliday I'm not so sure of. But Montague I can whip, the best day he ever stood in shoes."

It maddened Devereau again. Just when he was beginning to congratulate himself that his work was good.

"You can't lick him," he choked. "You couldn't lick him even if he was handcuffed and shackled to a ball and chain." He tossed aloft his arms.

"Champion! You, champion! Oh, my Gawd!"

He strode across the room. But he came back swiftly to the boy who had not moved in his chair.

"Get this now!" he barked. He was done with talk. Done with argument.

"Get this, because when I'm finished this time, I'm through. I've got my coin in this thing and so has Dunham. And we're going to drag down what we put in with a little something for interest. We're going to get ours, and then you can fight Montague and be damned—or Holliday. You can go throw your nice new title into the gutter as soon as you please, for all of me, and try being first prize sucker of the world for a change. But first I get mine. How I hate a fool!"

"You're fighting Hughie Gay a week from Saturday. All right. Hughie's a set-up. I saw to that. You can pick 'em yourself

hereafter. But right now your orders is to let Hughie stay the distance. A week from Saturday. Is that clear? Have you got that —sure?"

Blair sat silent. It is strange how silence will fool a man like Devereau. He made one last try for peace.

"And if you behave; if you're a good boy maybe we're going to forget we had this little misunderstanding. There's others besides Hughie just as soft. But if you're dead set on finding out who is boss; if you want to know whether you're Dunham's man or not, why just cross them orders. Pig-Iron's got ten thousand on that fight—ten thousand that you don't win by a knock-out, if you win at all. And if you cost him that ten— Well, just dump it, if you want to see!"

"I fight on the level," said Perry, "or I don't fight at all."

"Then you don't fight at all," said Devereau.

Blair held him a long time with an eye that was chill. His voice was quieter than before, if that were possible.

"I have sat here and taken talk from you, you vermin, that I'd take from no man, because I could figure no other way. They know, downstairs, that you are up here with me. If I kill you they will hang me, and I do not choose to hang for one like you. If I laid a finger on you, that would be assault, and you and your friends would swear me into jail. That would be high card for you. It would fill your hand. So I must sit here idle. But some day, maybe, I'm going to come upon you with no circumstances to hinder. And if I do I'm going to change you. You do not please me, as you are. Some day I hope to alter you so that you will be a curio, even to your own best friends. . . . Get out!"

The chill eye had frightened Devereau. It heartened him to hear that he was safe.

"We'll put you out on the street," he snarled. "You'll be standing on a corner, wondering what it's all about!"

"Get out!"

Devereau got.

CHAPTER VI

Felicity Crosses Broadway

AND Perry Blair *had* wanted to see. He hadn't listened to reason. He hadn't been a good boy. His bout with Gay was a repetition of that with Fanchette, the former title-holder. A brief half minute of boxing, a feint—and Gay on the canvas for the count of ten.

He had wanted to see. He had been consumed with desire to see. And it had happened quickly.

The victory failed to raise a second wave of adulation, even a ripple, in fact. Instead it was received oddly with scarcely any comment at all. Even the papers had but little to say, and that little noncommittal. For there were rumors. Devereau and Pig-Iron Dunham had done some preliminary work in

anticipation of the worst. And after the worst had come to be they went to work in earnest.

It was Devereau, Blair's own manager—ex-manager, the day after the Gay bout—who gave out the interview announcing the severance of business relations with the champion. There were reasons, he said, but he was not explicit. He left them veiled at first, purposely obscure.

What was the use of discussing it? Blair was a fluke champion anyway. Everybody knew that. Chance had made him, chance which had been luckless for Jimmy Montague. Montague, he said, had been selected as the logical man to meet Fanchette, the man whose record entitled him to the choice, long before any word of the proposed match had been given to the public. But Fanchette, after his prolonged inactivity, had demurred at meeting, immediately, so formidable an opponent. So they had selected Blair, merely

as a work-out for the title-holder. And the unforeseen had happened. Fanchette had proved to be through. Anyone—anyone could have whipped him.

But what about Gay? That was the natural question and they asked it. Blair had disposed of him, also in the first round.

But to that Devereau made no answer, no verbal answer, at least. He did not point out that Hughie was a set-up, a second-rater. No, indeed. He shrugged his shoulders—shrugged them almost audibly.

"I had nothing to do with it," he said. "Absolutely. Ask Blair about it. I've quit him."

Pig-Iron Dunham, who paid the bills, and Devereau who was cunning, did just what the latter had promised they would do. In a few short months they put Perry Blair, lightweight champion of the world, out on the sidewalk.

It can't be done? It is done every day, in

politics. It needs only a practiced hand.

For a day or two following Devereau's unsatisfactory laconism nothing developed. And then a bombshell exploded. Hughie Gay made a statement. He took oath, solemn oath (and cheap, too, for it cost Dunham but two hundred dollars), that he had sold out. Blair had realized that he was no champion; he had feared even him, Gay. So before the fight Blair had paid him well to throw it. And he had done so.

Thus, you see, they learned logically why Devereau had quit Perry. Devereau was square. Sure! This proved it. You said it! They understood perfectly those eloquent shoulder shrugs now. And they raised a righteous clamor. Perry Blair denied the charge, and offered to meet Gay again, anywhere, for any charity. And they replied, with equal logic, that every reputable club in the country should bar him thenceforth.

In a short interview, not as unsatisfactory

as Devereau's, Pig-Iron Dunham broke a rule and talked for publication.

"It is the sort of thing which has given a bad name to a clean and manly sport in this state," he said. "I sincerely trust, however, that all true lovers of the squared circle will put the blame where it belongs."

And in the meantime his paid mouthpieces parroted everywhere the words in which they had been drilled. He has no punch at all, they said; he can't hit. He has no science, they said; he is slow as a freight. He has not the fighter's heart. He's yellow—yellow! And that word stuck.

The clique which had rated his reticence stingy was eager to believe. They needed no persuading. So no throngs gathered round him any more. Those who had fawned passed by on the far side of the street, lest crudely he recall past accommodations. And, passing, they smiled. And the public, that public to which a world's champion was

something picturesque at which to crane the neck, if they recognized him at all now, had to concentrate to remember what it was that they had read lately about him. Crooked? That was bad. Not clever enough to get away with it? That was worse. Yellow? Well, that was unpardonable in any man. And they hardly hid their contempt.

After a few fruitless attempts Peiry gave up trying to find a new manager and sought bouts for himself. He found them, but on such terms that they were always impossible. He challenged Jimmy Montague, which was a bad tactical error, but he had been just a little panicky at first. He challenged Montague who was being hailed as the logical title-holder, and in so doing seemed tacitly to admit that he realized the claim was good.

Montague ignored him.

He challenged Holliday, and he was afraid of Holliday, too. And Holliday made game of him noisily.

"What'll it get me to fight you?" he wanted to know. "If I stub me toe and fall down, somebody'll raise a yelp that you bought me off. Not me! Us girls has got to be careful. Besides, I'm looking for a battle with the real champ."

It can't be done? Oh, they did it.

The night that Cecille Manners had hysterics and Felicity was hurrying because she knew that Fiegenspann would "bawl her out" if she was very late, Perry Blair had been standing from eleven o'clock until a quarter to twelve on the corner of Broadway and Forty-fourth Street, too proud to turn the collar of his light coat up against the winter cold, too broke to buy a heavy one. He'd almost decided to hunt a job, anything that would bring enough to take him back home. The Dream? Girl o' Mine? It hurt his throat to think of these,—made him blink his eyes.

So they had undermined him.

He was standing on a corner wondering what it was all about. But in that last three-quarters of an hour he had achieved something at least, a terse sentence that must, it seems, epitomize the sentiments of every idol who ever shared his predicament, every king who ever lacked a throne.

He nodded his head over it, and voiced it pensively.

"It's a great world," he muttered, "if you don't weaken."

Then he saw that she would very likely be killed if someone didn't do something about it besides shout. He weighed the chances, in an infinitesimal fraction of a second, and decided they were such that any good gambler could scarcely ignore. So he bunched his muscles and sprang.

Felicity's taxi had met a traffic tie-up at Forty-seventh Street which made further direct advance impossible. In obedience to her plain request for haste the driver had

tried it to the west, found that way cut off, and so detoured to the east. When, however, he wriggled up to Broadway on Forty-fourth Street he had met with no better luck.

Here was a din of horns, of racing motors, of harried traffic police. But not much chance of progress. So Felicity paid him and stepped off the running-board into the thick of it to have a try on foot at the very moment when the nearest officer thought to have it cleared.

He raised an arm and roared, bull-voiced: "Come on there, now!"

And promptly the drivers of the two cars which had been at the heart of the snarl, like key logs in a jam, both heckled, both in the wrong and filled with unsaid things, trod harshly upon their accelerators. Wire-wheeled sedan and lemon-tinted limousine, up-town bound and cross-town bound, they leaped simultaneously forward, as Felicity stepped between.

Bystanders screamed so efficiently that their shrill tumult drowned the wail of overtaxed brakedrums. But that would have helped Felicity little. Nor could the brakes, for that matter. The lunging start had been too strong, the space too short to stop in.

Perry Blair, about whom those who screamed had heard something unpleasant—oh, yes, yellow!—lanced down the narrowing aisle between radiator and fenders. He struck Felicity like a vicious tackler yet did not go down, but leaped again. As the cars crunched together they slithered through the crowd, across the walk, against a wall, into a heap. And the fall hurt Perry a little, even accustomed as he was to the taking of blows yieldingly. He was slow to rise. The girl was quickly up.

"Last down!" she gasped, but her exclamation was somewhat pallid like her wit. "Hold 'em, Yale!"

Then, while she still faltered, uncertain,

shaken, the occupant of the lemon-tinted limousine came swiftly to her. He was a great hulk of a man, yet light on his feet with that nimbleness which seems often astonishing in huge people.

"Let me put you in my car, Miss Brown," he begged, "and set you safely across. Not badly bruised, I trust?"

She gave him a flash of a glance and gasped again, but this time inaudibly. His ease with her name did not surprise her. He'd seen her often enough to know that. But this, she realized, was the first time that she had really been impressed upon him. Not too steadily, therefore, that she might need assistance, she let him help her back across the sidewalk, to the car, and thus away. Pig-Iron Dunham? Of course. Knowing Felicity there is small cause to wonder that she went without even remembering to thank her rescuer.

He was getting up now, the target of few

eyes. Most of those who lingered at all were staring after Dunham, Felicity and the lemon limousine. And Perry was congratulating himself, even while with an odd, detached expression he watched them go, that he had damaged but little his clothing, when a hand fell on his sleeve.

Perry turned to find a reporter, Hamilton by name, peering at him quizzically.

"Forgot to thank you, did she?" he laughed. "Oh, well, better come along over to the Roof with me and watch her caper, and give her another chance."

Perry didn't know whether he liked Hamilton or not, but he didn't instinctively distrust him.

"Who is she?" he asked.

"You really don't know?"

"I don't know many girls in this town."

"Hm-m-m," said Hamilton. "Thought everybody knew her. Felicity Brown. Aero Octet." And he repeated his invitation.

"She'll want to thank you for preventing damage to life or limb." He couldn't have said exactly what made him voice the rest, unless it was the way the boy's eyes had followed her.

"And believe me, damage to life or limb, it would have been an equal catastrophe to Felicity. Come on along."

Perry hung back.

"Don't you know," he hesitated, "that you can lose your reputation just from being seen talking to me?"

Hamilton laughed again. He saw, however, that Perry's mind was not upon what he was saying. And who shall say when fancy first was bred? Not you—or I—or even Hamilton. But the latter might have hazarded a shrewd guess. And a man, it would seem, has a little excuse for falling in love with a girl with Felicity's looks, whose life he just has saved.

"Come along," urged Hamilton. "I want

to hear about that mess. I've been six months in Mexico." But he eyed the boy with deeper curiosity as they crossed Broadway.

"Who was the man?"

Perry spoke just once to ask that question, before they left the white-lit street for the elevator.

"Dunham."

Yet somehow Hamilton was sure that the other had known all along. And the quizzical eyes became malicious. If the boy *was* falling in love with Felicity he anticipated with glee unholy complications. Dunham's alacrity at the scene of the accident no man could underestimate. Pig-Iron Dunham didn't, indiscriminately, beg young ladies to let the limousine bear them across Broadway in safety, or anywhere else, for that matter.

And yet, some hours later, when he had left Perry Blair waiting for Felicity at the mouth of the alley which ran back to the Roof's stage door, Hamilton found himself

with little relish for the complications which he had so wisely foreseen. Perry's story of the trouble with Devereau and Dunham he had had in full, and believed. He had wanted to do something and realized that there was not much which he could do.

And now this. It was funny—but it wasn't so damned funny either. Why, the kid was just—well, just a kid. And Felicity had been sweet to him. Very sweet and simple, in spite of his own none too well curbed sarcasm. Under Dunham's eye—because she knew that Dunham's eye was always upon her—she had sat long at their table, a slim thing in new-grass green, so prettily grateful that she suggested pink sashes and dimity. And Felicity wasn't a pink-sash-and-dimity girl. Hamilton knew that. But did Perry Blair? Just a kid! Dammitt! But nobody, not even a kid, had any right monkeying with Broadway, or Felicity, if he couldn't take care of himself.

Yet Hamilton, after he had said good-night, lingered a while. And again—immediately—something which he had anticipated came to pass.

The lemon limousine was waiting at the curb. And Dunham stepped out of it, again with his preposterous nimbleness, when Felicity appeared. He stood holding wide the door. But the girl gave him only a nice little nod. She slipped her hand happily into the crook of Perry's arm.

Hamilton had a glimpse of Pig-Iron Dunham's face.

"Hooked!" he exclaimed. "Hooked!"

But he had a good look at Perry Blair's too, as the pair passed.

"Dammitt!" he snapped. "Dammitt!" And yet folks wondered why a chap who knocked around this city hunting news sometimes drank more than was good for him.

CHAPTER VII

As Willows Bud in Spring

CECILLE was still up, staring out of the window, when Felicity and Perry Blair came in that night. Perry stayed but a moment, only long enough to promise that he would come again. Then he was gone. And Felicity was standing before the other girl, every line of her pulsing triumph.

"Not him!" Cecille cried. She could not have understood the triumph better had Felicity explained with a torrent of words.

"Oh, not him!" with quick, unthinking horror. "He—he's only a boy."

"Who?" demanded Felicity blankly.

"Mr.—Mr. Blair."

Felicity's laugh was staccato.

"Him? Good Lord, no. Dunham!" She fairly sang it. "Dunham. Pig-Iron

Dunham. I knew if I waited I'd cop. Now watch me. Watch my dust!"

Cecille wondered why she didn't pack her bag and get out. But she didn't. She stayed. And later, a little timidly, she inquired about Blair.

"Perry Blair?" Felicity with a racing tongue had been describing how Dunham led her away from the near-accident.

"Perry? Oh, he's a prize-fighter. Light-weight champion, or he was for a minute or so. He wouldn't play the game when he had his chance, I guess, so Dunham and the bunch broke him. Something like that. I never did hear the inside stuff. But they say he was a bust anyway—just a morning-glory—and didn't know his luck. But do I? Did I play the game to-night? Did I pass up Pig-Iron and his limousine to come home in a flat-wheeled trolley with my hero, who's already made him sore once? Oh, didn't I though! I guess I'm crazy!"

Cecille recoiled a little from that.

A prize-fighter. A bruiser. A plug-ugly. But—but—why, that wasn't possible. And if your idea of such a one is what Cecille's once was, neither will he fill your eye.

Just a kid. Hamilton had hit it off aptly at that. Level-eyed and diffident of tongue, with only a hint of his hidden bodily perfection lurking in breadth of shoulder and slenderness of waist.

A prize-fighter! Cecille fell asleep wondering how soon he would come again. As to whether he would come at all she was never for a moment in doubt. Once she had watched his eyes follow Felicity across the room she *knew*. But she hadn't felt sorry for him as Hamilton had. She felt sorry for herself and bitter against Perry. For the time she hated him.

Nor did she have to wonder long. Perry came the next night and escorted Felicity to the Roof. And the next. And next. Then

Felicity realized that it would not be good policy to make Dunham sulk. Indeed she knew her luck. Indeed she played the game. The third evening she left Perry at home with Cecille.

And for six whole weeks Broadway nudged and watched it. Broadway watched Perry Blair's courtship of Felicity and Dunham's, if you can call the latter's unhurried pursuit that. Dunham was complacent and patient. Felicity's tactics were not new to him and he did not mind being made conspicuous. And Perry Blair never knew they nudged; never knew they laughed. There is some satisfaction in that. But it is far finer, I think, to be sure that Broadway never guessed at all of the other courtship which went steadily forward in the same interval, elementally, naturally as willows bud in spring. Perry himself was unaware of it. Cecille too—for a while.

For Felicity left him oftener and oftener

to the other girl. And almost immediately a common need for the companionship of the other was born in both of them. Upon the boy's part it must have been the urge to carry on his courtship, even vicariously. Lonesomeness was the way Cecille explained it to herself until with the passage of a little time she could no longer tell herself that lie and believe it. And that marked the beginning of a long bad period for her.

She ceased soon to hate him when he spoke of Felicity. Whenever he observed haltingly, as he did over and over again, that it was no place for a girl like her (Fiegenspann's) and that she should be gotten out before it was too late, she learned to agree with him mechanically. Instead of hating his blindness, as persistently as she dared she swung the conversation more and more to other things.

From the beginning she found it hard to make him talk about himself. That instantly

set him apart from all other men in her experience. For they had talked of little else. And yet, when finally she had it from him, she found his ambition anything but vague.

"I like animals," he told her on one such occasion, "and the—the country. I guess that's what I am, a country boy. I sure would like to own a ranch."

He'd not pressed her so eagerly for her hopes. Scarcely. His singleness of interest at least was wholly masculine. But that didn't deter her. She found herself giving them to him just the same, just as eagerly.

"A ranch!" she seized hungrily upon that word. "A home! A white house on a hill with light green shutters. The house, of course, not the hill." She went further.

"And a white and blue kitchen." Her haste to tell him was bubbling. "With aluminum pots and pans. Dozens! A whole set!"

And, somehow subdued:

"They're very expensive."

Broadway never knew anything about that courtship. But Felicity used to wake up, now and then, and hear the other girl crying softly in the night.

It was a long bad period for Cecille. At first the birth of this wholly new thing within her baffled her own power to reason. She watched its mushroom growth with fascination, just a little aghast. But when, all in a kind of cataclysmic flash, she thought to recognize it for what it was, she shrank away as if from a malignant fungus.

From the first evening one thing had intrigued her. Her discovery that the sensation of pervading cleanliness which she always had from him was not a result of the careful clothes he wore but something more essential made her remember how the Sunday-groomed louts of other days, reeking with cheap toilet water and hair oil, had filled her with dull loathing. She had never

attempted an analysis of that distaste. Now trying to analyze its opposite, in the case of Perry Blair, she arrived at a disquieting certainty. She found she could no more be near him, no more glance at him, without being conscious of him physically, than she could strike her head against a wall and not be hurt.

She realized more. She realized how keenly she liked being near him. She realized how often, and for how long, she had been making little opportunities to stand close, so that her shoulder brushed his. How often she had contrived a fleeting contact of their hands. And yet if anybody had tried to tell her that this was the blooming of a perfect thing to be cherished all her days she would have suffered unutterably that she had been found out. As it was she suffered sufficiently. She cried too often into her pillow. But she wasn't yet wholly debased in her own eyes. That came directly, inevitably.

One Saturday afternoon, urged more enthusiastically by him than she had ever been urged before, she accompanied him to a gymnasium far uptown.

"I'm keeping in shape, you see," he told her without his usual diffidence. "I don't know quite why. Everybody says I'm through, but sometimes I think something may turn up. Enough to bring me a little stake anyhow. And, anyway, it pays me a little. I'm working out with Jack English. He's a welter; he's getting ready for a go with Levitt. I've told you a lot about this business, but you can't judge much just from talk. I—I'd like to have you come up and watch me box."

There it was, of a sudden. There was his shyness again, so lamely come upon him that it colored his face. And the halting boyishness of the request had warmed Cecille's face too; warmed her through and through. She knew an impulse to hug his head to her

breast, a very mature and motherly impulse.

He had told her much of this business; so much that she hardly recoiled from it at all. A welter—yes, she understood that. Between a light-weight and a middle.

But she hesitated so long that he thought he had guessed her objection and hastened to reassure her.

"There won't be anybody there," he said. "Nobody. Just English and his trainer and me. You needn't be afraid—"

"I'm not," she stopped him. "It's not—that."

So she went.

CHAPTER VIII

My Lad

SHE found herself an hour later in a huge light room, with a floor like a dance hall and much strange paraphernalia against the walls. Little of it she was able to identify, though she took it all in with alert and eager eyes. This was the chiefest part of his life, so she must not even seem to slight it. The Indian clubs and dumb-bells—but they were easy. And the roped-off square at one end. That was the ring.

She found herself alone for a while, and was thrilled and excited and very happy. And then a quiet man who was, she guessed correctly, English's trainer came briskly toward her.

"You needn't be afraid." So Perry had assured her.

Surely not if this man's bearing was any criterion. He brought her a chair.

"Thank you." Her voice sounded small in that high-ceiled room. He only bowed in reply and went quietly away.

And then the next time she looked up it was to find Perry standing there beside her—a different Perry—a pagan Perry, stripped of all save trunks and shoes, yet unconscious of his nakedness.

"I'm not afraid," she'd told him. "It's not that."

Now she knew why she had hesitated about coming. And she was sorry, and breathlessly glad.

A pagan Perry, and one more beautiful than she otherwise could ever have dreamed. And yet, after the first startled glance, while she still dropped her head and put palms to her cheeks to hide a furious color, his lack of self-consciousness dismayed her, until it occurred to her that these were his working

clothes—casual, ordinary. And with that a queer thought, seemingly unrelated, flashed through her head. She remembered that women almost never went to prize-fights—it was a man's sport—and she was jealously glad over that.

It shamed her. But she looked again. And again. And sudden rebellion at that shame led her to a wholly spontaneous, wholly unconsidered act. Perry was deep in abstraction. She knew what he was brooding over. That made her rebellious, too. Suddenly she reached out and laid her hand upon his bare shoulder.

He looked around and smiled.

"Hard?" He believed he understood the expression he had surprised in her eyes.

"I'm in pretty good shape. I'm pretty hard."

She made only a muffled attempt at reply. She found it, without speaking, hard enough to breathe.

Hard? Yes. Unexpectedly undentable, like a billiard ball. Nor could she very well stammer that it was the smoothness of his skin which had stunned her. She dropped her head again. She could not have kept it up after that and kept her eyelids open.

When she finally lifted it Perry was already in the ring and English vaulting the ropes. English was as unclothed as the other, yet she found immediately that she could look at him without any disturbing mixture of ecstasy and guilt. And even critically, too. He was thick, bulky. He did not make one catch one's breath. And brown. And Perry's whiteness! She took her lower lip between her teeth.

"Time!" the trainer called.

She cried sharply aloud.

The sound came unsummoned, in spite of herself.

Why, they had just been standing there

together—just talking—just laughing—just boys! But with that signal they had exploded into action. No other word could hope to convey that sudden burst of motion.

They touched gloves! She followed that. English tried to hit him! She followed that. And then thud! thud! thud! She could not beat as swiftly with one fist the palm of her other hand as Perry's glove struck thrice the welter's face.

Thud! thud! thud! And skip and shuffle —thud! And a straining, desperate embrace.

"Oh, he's so much bigger," she heard herself wailing. "He's *so* much bigger!"

And the trainer, remembering through it all her presence:

"Watch it! Watch it! Watch—that—left—hand!"

She saw then that it was Perry's short, jabbing, stiff left forearm which perplexed the heavier man. She saw the latter set himself to swing, and take it in the face, and go off

balance. And set and take it again. And she didn't cry out any more. She leaned forward, so tensely set herself in every muscle that she found she was tired when the trainer stopped it.

"Time!"

The trainer she learned then was not pleased. He snarled at Jack English. But English only grinned.

"Slow!" he said. "Slow! Oh, boy! So'd you look slow trying to pace the Empire State Express."

And there was more. Faster, faster and faster. And crueler! He could never tell her again that this was merely sport. And English *was* bigger and his size did count. At the last he seemed barely to snap his right gloved hand forward, and Perry staggered back.

"Time!"

She thanked God, out loud, for that.

Perry stood for a while, his back toward

her, sagging against the ropes. And English, one hand on his shoulder, was talking to him.

"Is he hurt?" she weakly asked the trainer.

He gave her a fleet glance.

"Some. Not bad." And louder to the other two:

"That's plenty."

A second later Perry nodded across the room to her and went to dress. But Jack English slid through the ropes and approached. There was some blood on his lip, and he wiped it away. She marveled at so little sign of conflict. He came straight to her, glistening with sweat. The trainer threw him a robe, which he wrapped about him to his very chin. She thought the welter-weight was bashful, too. And Irish—that without a doubt from his bright eyes.

"Your lad?" he asked.

"My—my what?"

She'd hardly been ready for the abrupt question. It confused her.

"Your steady?" This time he nodded toward the door through which Perry had disappeared.

Jack English was almost thirty—an old man for the prize-ring—and had a family. Under his bright regard Cecille stammered, and stammered a lie.

"Yes," she said, not steadily, and very softly indeed. "Yes, my—my lad."

English nodded sagely.

"Been worried about him lately, I suppose? Bothered by what folks are saying?"

"I—I haven't heard much," she said, and this was all the truth.

"Don't you!" he advised her. "Don't you listen. And don't you believe, either."

Still that bright regard. And thereupon Cecille realized that she had been troubled deeply by one thing which she had heard. Felicity had passed it on to her.

"They say he cheated," she voiced it, wide-eyed. "That he has a—yellow streak."

"So's a Bengal tiger." Such succinctness was reassuring. "A whole lot of 'em. And a man like him don't cheat. You'd oughta know that." Laconic, but good to listen to. And again:

"Don't you worry. I never saw a man so fast—so quick! That's why I'm using him. And some day—some day when he's in earnest—he's going to find out that he can hit. And they? They've said words that they'll choke then to swallow."

"I hope so." Her voice was meek and small.

"I know so," said English. "Don't you worry. You've picked a game guy. He can take punishment. You stick!"

"I—I mean to." Her voice was smaller still.

She wanted to cry.

And that night when they were riding home together upon a bus-top she tried an experiment. How long they had been riding thus

she did not know, but all in a breath she was conscious of the contact of his knee. That was what she had been avoiding—trying to make herself avoid—ever since she'd grown aware of her impulse to stay always close. But now she tried an experiment. She contemplated the contact contentedly for a time. Then drew away.

Perry had been thinking of Felicity.

"Crowding you?" he asked.

She shook her head. And a minute later she let her knee move back against him. Proved! Instantly the tiny pulse had picked up its throbbing in her throat. Yet she let the contact endure. Defiant, she rode all the way home that way.

But the inevitable reaction came. Revulsion might be the more accurate word applied to Cecille. That night she had stripped off one stocking in preparation for bed; she had sat longer than she could have told, broodingly studying her bare knee.

"No smoother than he," she murmured at last.

The sound of her own voice smote her, the thing that she had said.

As her head flung up she encountered in a mirror her own reflection. She stared, transfixed, at her image; her moist, curling mouth, her dusky cheeks and eyelids drooping down. Then she closed her eyelids tight to shut it out. She groped and found the light and snapped it off. And she lay hours upon her face, her hair fanwise on her pillow, sick and debased.

She laid it to the pitch that she had touched. You *had* to be defiled. But she didn't blame Felicity. She wasn't that kind of a coward. It must be the slow poison of her frank creed. She'd fight it. Game? She'd be game. But this time she refused to wonder why she didn't pack her bag and get out. She couldn't. She knew she couldn't go. She wondered why she couldn't cry.

Thus she found a private little hell in what should have been pure glory.

But she fought. After she had admitted to herself that she loved him, she crouched from it like something in a corner. Love? That wasn't love! And yet Felicity in all her passionless calculation had never once—

It baffled her, bowed her down. It was too snarled now. She'd never make it out. But she wouldn't go again to the gymnasium. No! But what of that? She had only to close her eyes to see. She fought it.

It was a very hot though private little hell.

CHAPTER IX

DUNHAM TALKS BUSINESS

AND presently Perry learned why he had been keeping in shape. Something did turn up. It happened in this wise:

Felicity had been very canny; she'd made each trump card tell. And with Perry Blair waved always in his face, Dunham had grown ugly.

"You know I'm crazy about you," he complained. "Give that four-flusher the gate."

"A million Johns have told me that," Felicity answered. "Talk business."

But Dunham had refused to talk business. He was ugly about it. And then he thought to see a way around. He sent for Perry Blair, and Perry came. That surprised Dun-

ham. He had expected in the end to have to go to Blair. He did not know how Felicity, unwittingly, had helped him.

For Felicity, unable not to enjoy a little the boy's inarticulate devotion, had indulged herself. With artistry that would have called down from Hamilton even hotter sarcasm, she had let Perry glimpse her soul; not the cheap and tawdry thing which unsympathetic persons were likely to think it, but her real one, a little saddened, a little forlorn!

"I wish I could get away from all this," she'd said, with appropriate wistfulness. "I'm dead sick of it—sick of it all. I wish I could go away—somewhere—anywhere where things are clean. Where there are trees and growing grass—"

It was a very good speech. She knew it must be because she had heard a high-priced leading lady utter it in a three-dollar-and-a-half Broadway success.

And it proved effective uttered by Felicity.

For it fooled Perry. Fooled him badly just when he had begun to speculate a little concerning her soul himself. Perry believed her. But then it is easy for any woman to fool any man. Twice as easy when he wants so badly to be fooled.

Perry cursed his lack of ready money. And then Dunham sent for him. And he went, hiding his eagerness.

They held the conversation in Dunham's book-lined office. The books were never used; the office saw strange usage. And the conference was short.

"Ready to be a good boy?" Dunham asked.

Perry rose to leave.

"Sit down," said Dunham. "That was intended as a joke. My mistake."

But it angered him; angered him almost as much as it did to look upon the boy's unsquandered youth.

"I've got something for you at last," he offered. "If you care to take it."

"I'll listen," said Perry.

So Dunham drew readily upon invention.

"We've talked it over," he said. "Devereau and I and some of the other boys. And we've decided that there's nothing in it for any of us as the situation now stands. The title's too obscured. You claim it. So does Montague. So we've decided to offer you a match with—"

"I've challenged Montague," Perry interrupted. "He paid no attention to it."

"Not Montague," Dunham corrected silkily. "Holliday."

And instantly Perry knew what Dunham hoped to do.

"Why not Montague?" he asked.

"Why not Holliday?" countered Dunham, his voice silkier still.

And Perry couldn't very well say because Montague was a boxer first and a fighter afterward. He couldn't say because he knew they considered Holliday, young, wicked,

punishing, even more certain to whip him. He hesitated.

"But you're going to whip Holliday," Dunham went on tentatively, as if sure of what was in the other's mind.

Perry watched him.

"We're going to see to that. It'll be a twenty-round fight to a decision. Somewhere in the South. But you'll stop Holliday in the eighth round."

"I fight fair," said Perry, "or I don't fight at all."

"Don't get excited." Dunham was laughing at him a little, not pleasantly. "You'll be no party to anything—ah—iniquitous. Beat him before that if you're able. But it'll come in the eighth, don't doubt that. I'm just telling you beforehand so that you'll lose no sleep in case you're afraid of Holliday." That was a thrust. "I'm telling you so you needn't kill yourself training to get ready, though you don't look over-fed." That was

another. Yet Perry felt that he had balanced them both when he looked the huge man's jelly-bulk up and down.

"Holliday's going to be champion some day," Dunham went unconcernedly on. "He's bound to be, whether we want him or not. But Montague comes first. Montague's been a good boy. We merely require your agreement to meet him should you dispose of Holliday, that is all. And since that is assured—" He waved a fat hand. "Personally I believe that Montague is very much better than you are—no offense intended—and against him you can take care of yourself."

Rapidly Perry cast it up. They were that confident of Holliday's superiority! And they didn't care whether he suspected their game or not; they weren't even bothering to work carefully. He could take it or leave it. He'd have to. That rank! That coarse! It was an easy sum. Two and two made four.

"Whatever agreement is fixed between you and Holliday is no affair of mine," he decided at last. "When?"

"A month—five weeks."

"How much?"

Dunham pondered.

"Twenty thousand. We'll give you five for your share."

They were that cool!

"Not me."

"A twenty-thousand-dollar purse seems reasonable," ruminated Dunham. "It may not be a popular match. And Holliday'll come high."

"That's your affair. I'll fight one way."

Dunham lifted an eyebrow.

"Well?"

"Winner take all."

"But you're certain to win! The fight'll be fixed!"

Perry sensed then how greatly the gross man wanted to laugh. Not bother to train?

That old one! Did Dunham really think he was taking him at his word? Why, his mind in all the days to come would be riveted on just one thing—that eighth round. He wanted to laugh, too, bitterly. Did they think he was that innocent!

"That's your affair," he repeated. "I fight winner take all."

There are some who insist that Pig-Iron Dunham was not without a virtue. His next words seem to prove it.

"Better take your five thousand," he suggested good-naturedly. "It's better than nothing. Holliday could double-cross us."

That cool!

"Winner take all," droned Perry.

"Winner take all!" Dunham snapped.

And that afternoon they signed articles, Hamilton acting for Blair.

The same night Perry told Felicity what he had done.

"So I—I'll either have twenty thousand

dollars in a month or so," he made bad work of it, "or I'll know that I'm never likely to have it. If you—if you'll wait . . . I'm glad you like the country. I've always wanted a ranch."

Felicity was needlessly callous, either because it made her despise herself a little for the part she had played, or because she was just Felicity. Surely she was more brutal than she need have been.

For she sat, chin propped upon one hand, and stared derisively into the boy's self-conscious eyes.

"You poor hick!" she said deliberately. "You poor cross-roads hick! Twenty thousand dollars? Why, that's chicken-feed compared with my price."

In one way it was merciful. It was quickly over. Perry's self-consciousness passed. Calm as she had been impudent he surveyed her. Once his lip twitched; he half-opened his mouth as if to speak, and then thought

better of it. He'd talk to no woman like that. He left her without a word.

And she sat biting her lip a little while, till Dunham came to the table.

"Honey—" he began.

"Don't honey me!" The words lashed back at him. "I'm sick of honeying. Talk cash!"

And Dunham was sick of temporizing. He talked.

So when Cecille came in the next day, Saturday, at noon, and found Felicity with her bag packed, few words were necessary. She knew the moment had come.

CHAPTER X

Cecille Plays the Game

CECILLE had tried often to imagine what that moment was going to be like. More than once she had dreaded that it would find her cheaply dramatic; that nervous sentiment would surprise her and break her down. Now she met it, unconcerned, without the slightest sense of shock. She had never doubted that Felicity would be anything but matter-of-fact and jaunty, right up to the end. Now it was the other girl who displayed unexpected feeling.

For Cecille had learned that morning that Perry was leaving at midnight for the South. With Felicity gone she realized how little chance there was of his ever returning again to frequent the apartment. And nothing else in the world much mattered. She was too

deep sunk in misery even to try to dissemble her apathy. But Felicity had not forgotten a single night when she had waked to hear the other girl crying; she missed nothing of her present dejection.

"Well, I'm off!" This without even turning from the mirror.

Cecille failed to answer. She crossed the room and dropped heavily into a chair.

"We're catching the three-thirty this afternoon for the West."

Again silence for a while, and then a dry, strained question.

"Aren't you afraid?"

She'd made up her mind to ask at least that question. She had admitted to herself that she had to ask it. And her tone made Felicity wheel.

"Of what?" Felicity demanded, a little blank.

Cecille laughed. It was a woeful, croaking attempt at flippancy.

"Oh, the old line of stuff!" She had never before employed Felicity's brand of slang. It came unpleasantly from her tongue. "The wages of sin and all that sort of thing."

That brought Felicity across the room until she stood, hands bracketed on hips, above her.

"Don't you worry about me, Cele," she said slowly. "Don't you nor any one else spend any pennies buying extras, expecting to strike news of my violent and untimely end. Safety First; that's my maiden name. I let Dunham drive thirty-five when he's sober. When he isn't, I walk. And I'm going to be that careful about deep water that I'll bathe always under a shower. Don't you worry about me." She paused soberly.

"It's you," she stated, "I'm worried about."

It was Felicity who displayed feeling at the end.

She stood quite a while staring down at the other girl's bright hair. Then with an air

of definite purpose she drew up a chair for herself.

"I don't get you," she mused. "You're a queer kid.

". . . From the country?"

"I suppose so," Cecille admitted. "I didn't use to think so. I used to think we were quite—"

"That'll do," cut in Felicity. "I get it from that much description.

". . . Raised strict?"

"I guess so—pretty strict."

"Rigid church people?"

"Yes."

A little time of silence.

"Gee, that's tough!"

And Felicity's gravity at last had caught at the other girl's attention. Slowly she looked up.

"Why?" she asked dully.

Felicity sat and studied her—pondered her. Felicity's face was harder than Cecille

had ever seen it before, and infinitely more tender.

"I hate to leave you," she said. "I wouldn't mind so much if I could *get* you. If I could once get it through my nut what you're waiting for—what you expect there's going to be in it for you—it wouldn't be so hard. But I can't."

"I don't know what you mean." She had caught Cecille's interest now.

"Neither do I," she admitted. "Not exactly. That's why I'm talking. That's what I'm trying to get at." Her voice became half-absent-minded, ruminative, as though she were thinking aloud.

"They caught me young, too," she murmured. "Oh, that was a long time ago. Not measured in years, measured in time. There's a difference.

"A mission-school got hold of me. Good women, not brainless velvet pets from the younger set, looking for a new sensation.

Good women, sincere women that wanted to help. Well, I was sincere, too. I wanted to be helped. I told 'em so; but I also told 'em I doubted if they could do much.

"I'd begun to get wise to one thing that early. I was seventeen, but I'd begun to see that all you got in this world was what you helped yourself to. But I was willing to try; I'd try anything once. If learning things out of a book would do it; if studying how to shoot the right language in the right spot and how to live sweet and pretty, inside and out, was going to get me what I wanted, well and good. Also, soft! There couldn't be any easier way, several well-known draymas to the contrary. So I gave 'em a chance.

"'Show me,' I said. And I stuck it out two years."

She stared at the ceiling, her eyes sardonic with reminiscence.

"Two years. Get that. Not two days, nor two weeks, nor two months. Two *years*.

And did I see myself at the end of that time any nearer what I was after? I hadn't slacked, mind you. I'd worked! Everything they'd ever spilled I'd sopped up like a sponge. And did it finally bring me a chance? Sure it did, believe you me. A whiskey drummer with false teeth!"

Here she laughed, a slurring note or two.

"That cured me, I guess. I did stay a little longer, but I knew! I knew I was through. I stayed another week, and then I went to the mat.

" 'Show me,' I said again. That was what I wanted, a show-down. And did they? Could they? Bah! They talked! They told me I was making wonderful progress.

" 'Sure,' I admitted. 'I'm on my way. I see that.' But what I wanted 'em to slip me was a little info as to where was I going.

"Well, they talked. What did I hope for? What did I want? What did I expect to get out of it? And I told 'em. Well, that was

a pretty large order for a girl of my station. My station didn't figure, I told 'em; we'd leave that out of it. And I told 'em so plainly that they neglected to refer to that any more.

"But they took another tack instead. The things that I'd mentioned were mere material things! Like that—scornful—as if they weren't worth mentioning at all. 'Merely material!' And there was a better world to live in—oh, my, yes—the world of the spirit.

"'Do you live in it?' I asked. 'Do you?' They wore sealskin coats, when it wasn't mink or chinchilla. They were driving downtown every day in their own closed cars to urge me to be content with the things of the spirit. And when I realized that— No, I wasn't sore. I was just hep, that's all.

"'I'll try Broadway,' I said then. 'If there's nothing, after all, in this climb-though-the-rocks-be-rugged stuff, no great harm done. I'm still young. But why waste more

valuable time? I'll try Broadway,' I said. 'I'll have a whirl at the primrose path.'

"They didn't believe me at first. They thought I was just bluffing, just talking because I was discouraged. So they talked themselves some more—a whole lot more. Beautiful words—but they didn't mean anything. Not to me.

"Did any of 'em say: 'Sure, I understand. You're young and pretty, and it's natural you should crave such things. Here's my last year's coat and a perfectly miserable old last year's model car'? Did they? Don't make me laugh! Not that they woulda missed them. Nothing like that!

"And if they'd only come out flat in the beginning and admitted: 'Sure, it's a fight—we know that—a finish fight between women like you and women like us,' I could have liked 'em for it. If they'd said: 'We want these things, so do you, and only men can buy 'em—take 'em if you can,' that woulda been

all right with me. But did they? You know the answer. They were telling *me* not to rough it, while *they* all the while, every chance they got, were hitting in the clinches! They were chirping to me, 'Oh, see how lovely the things of the spirit are,' while they were hanging with a death grip to everything material that they could get their hands on. I'd been honest with them—sincere. And with me they had been as hypocritical as hell!

"But when finally I made 'em see that I was on, and that I was in earnest, it sobered them. They quit then that line of chatter. They were battling now, and they pulled another one. Sure, just what you called it a minute ago. The old line of stuff. They pulled that. They tried to scare me. Me! But I wouldn't scare, not for a cent. I was already scared half crazy—scared of matrimony with a drummer with false teeth.

"'Hell!' That was what they threatened me with. 'Hell,' they tried to warn me.

"'How do you know?' I came back at 'em. 'How do you know? Maybe there's been slander here. Maybe it's not so hot. Maybe it's only semitropical!' And they couldn't beat that. They couldn't even tie it. But they went right on trying.

"'The wages of sin,'—they began. But I beat 'em to that punch.

"'They're damned fine wages,' I said. The cuss-word slipped out. I was always sorry about that. I always aimed to be awful respectful. 'They're damned fine wages! A car to ride around in,—sure, merely material just like yours, but better than a strap in the subway with all the men sitting down. And clothes—not shoddy rags. Clothes! Silk things, with lace on 'em, and rosebuds. And a place to live in with trees in the lobby and a tub level with the bath-room floor, and a chaise-something-or-other.' Oh, I'd been reading! I hadn't been studying for nothing. I knew!

"'I want to live in a world where things smell better,' I said. 'I'm dead tired of a world that stinks!'

"Well, they kept a'trying. I'll say that for 'em. Game—you bet. I don't believe they overlooked much either. 'The gutter,' they said. 'I'm in it now,' I came back. 'Your self-respect,' they said. 'Nobody else respects me,' I trumped that, 'or even cares that I'm alive.' And then I went after 'em strong. 'But give me the car,' I said, 'and the apartment and the clothes, and see. Why, I'll have 'em walking the length of every hotel dining-room in town, just to be recognized by me!' 'The men,' they said. 'Sure,' I agreed, 'the men. Isn't that what counts? Don't try to tell me that this isn't a man's world. I know! And won't they?'

"That stopped 'em for a minute. They didn't want to answer. They thought an awful lot of the truth at times, for folks that'd lie to themselves all day long. 'Won't they?'

I wouldn't quit it. I made 'em come through.

"'Perhaps,' they admitted then. Alas, that was the way of the world. But it was wrong!

"'Sure,' I agreed again. 'Sure. You're telling me no news. But if the whole world's wrong, who am I to stand out? Who am I?' I wanted to know. 'Let's make it unanimous.'

"'The wages of sin,' they tried it again. They'd expected to put me down for the count with that one, and they hated to see it go to waste.

"'Can you show me something just as good?' I asked. 'Half as good? A tenth as good? I want to be straight. I'd rather be straight. Here's a proposition. You folks have got more than you can ever spend on yourselves. Pool a little of it—ten of you—and give me a job that you don't figure sinful. I'm willing to work. I've proved that to you. Guarantee me something a tenth as

good as the wages I've mentioned, at the end of ten years—I'll not be thirty then; I'll take a chance on still being able to enjoy 'em—guarantee me that and I'll scrub floors for you in the meantime.'

"And then they pulled the prize crack of them all. I hadn't heard it before. It was a new one on me.

"'Virtue,' they said, 'virtue is its own reward.'

"Honest, I laughed. I couldn't help it. I didn't want them to see that I was wise to them. I didn't even want to hurt their feelings. It was pretty serious to them, this step that I was taking. But I couldn't help it. I laughed. And then I got mad.

"'Virtue is its own reward? Is it?' I asked. 'Is it? Go out there and stand on Fifth Avenue,' I said, 'and watch 'em roll by. Your daughter! And yours! And yours! Ten thousand of 'em, no younger than I am, no prettier, and no more moral right now.

Go out and watch them roll by and then try to tell me that. Violets and silver fox! Is virtue their only reward?'

"Well, they'd not meant it the same way, in my case. I kept getting 'em wrong, they said. They'd meant it in the abstract, applied to me. 'But what about the wages of sin, in my case?' Had they been abstract there? 'Death—the gutter.' That was concrete, wasn't it? It sounded like bedrock to me. Then they wanted to explain. I wouldn't let 'em.

" 'If you had been on the level I could have respected you,' I said. 'If you had told me, sure this is a selfish world and we are of it, I'd have liked you fine. I'm strong for a rascal, if he's an honest rascal. But I hate a hypocrite.'

"I'd got 'em between me and the ropes where I wanted 'em, at last.

" 'I've wasted two whole years,' I shot it over from the shoulder. 'Two whole years, trying to compete with them'—I nodded

toward the Avenue—'according to their own rules. And you've been coaching me, when all the while you knew I was licked, that way, before I started. Now let *them* compete with *me,* according to *my* rules, for a change. Let them run to their dressmakers and order their gowns a little lower and their skirts a little higher and lie to themselves and say they must keep in style, when they know they've got to keep their men and don't care how they do it. Let *them* try it—damn 'em!'

"I shouldn't have cussed. But I couldn't help it. I was bitter. If they'd only been frank and man-to-man about it. The toughest birds in the world stand in the middle of the ring and shake hands before they try to murder each other. If they'd just said, 'This is no pretty game, this is a finish fight,' I'd have loved 'em for it. I guess women can't be frank and man-to-man.

"One set of rewards for me—and one for them! Abstract for me—and concrete for

them! Two sets of rules! It's time some authority drafted a new set, to cover both ends of this deal. But in the meantime—'I don't want to play that way,' I said. 'I'd rather fight!' "

Abruptly she stopped.

"And I've been fighting ever since," she spoke in a less urgent fashion. "And I'm going to keep on fighting—right up to the end. But you—is that the kind of stuff they slipped you too, Cele?"

Cecille had been listening without a sound, her eyes clinging to Felicity's face, which was twisted, somewhat awry.

"Is that what they slipped you too?"

Cecille licked her lips. They were dry.

"I—I guess so."

"And that suits you? You think that's fair and square?"

"I don't know," Cecille whispered dully. "I don't know."

"Then it's time you found out," Felicity

flung at her fiercely. "I had to. It was put up to me just as cold. I didn't want to, any more than you do. They aren't my rules; they're theirs! But I had to decide. And it's time you figured it out."

Again Cecille touched her lip with the tip of her tongue.

"I've been trying to," she faltered. "But I—it don't seem to me as though I want as much as you do. I'd be content with oh-so-little. With a home, and a—and a man from whom I didn't shrink when he touched me and—and—" She could go no further. That was too vivid, too intimate.

It was Felicity who displayed her feelings at the end. And already she was beginning to scorn herself for having paraded them.

"Oh-so-little!" she mocked. She did not mean to be derisive. "Just that! Just a home—just a man—a real man—content!"

"Would you be?" Cecille asked the question unaware of the other's irony.

"Say, who do you think I am," she asked, "to try to dictate terms like that to life? *What* do you think I am? A champion? Because that's what you're talking now. The whole purse—or nothing! I *know* my limits. I'm going to be glad to get a fair percentage split for my share. A home! A man! Content! I get you at last, Cecille. It's you who'd better come to. For whether you know it or not, you're talking winner—take—all!"

She rose then. She shrugged her arms and stretched them high above her head, and all visible emotion slipped from her like a discarded garment.

"And that's *that!*" she stated easily. She went back to the mirror and adjusted her veil. Then came a brief and awkward moment.

"Well, I guess I'll be going," she said. "The rent's paid a month in advance. Don't let that Shylock landlord gyp you."

"I won't," said Cecille.

"Well, I guess I'll be going." She picked

up her bag. They did not kiss each other.

"Well—so-long."

"I—I wish you—" Cecille checked herself. She had been about to say I wish you happiness. She meant that, yet clumsily she changed it.

"I wish you luck."

At that Felicity paused.

"Does this hat look all right?"

Cecille nodded. And then she was gone.

* * * * * *

So Felicity passes. No dark river. No swift oblivion. No agony of remorse. Those who may feel that her history is incomplete, that they have been robbed of their full meed of vindictive satisfaction, I must refer back to an earlier paragraph. And to those who may say, Here is a dangerous departure from the formula for such tales, there is only one honest retort. Felicity isn't a figment of fancy. Felicity's from the life.

* * * * * *

toppled. She was
d, cornered, driven
dn't stand it. He
ever come back.
e in it for her?

t? She knew she
but she conceived
sperate expedient,
ifully transparent.
n their building.
g matches to light
stairs, though that
she knew every
ht when he struck
ahead. When it
t out, she crum-
ch brought him
little heap upon
doubled beneath

d.

Cecille sat quiet after Felicity had gone, until darkness crept into the room. She rose then, mechanically, and prepared and ate some supper. Later Perry Blair came and she found that pressing as her own problem seemed she could still think first of him. She would not tell him now of Felicity's dereliction. He needed a single mind to face his coming struggle. He would learn of it soon enough.

Later still they went out and walked, till he had only time enough left in which to catch his train. Both of them were silent. Neither felt any inclination to talk. But Cecille's brain had been as uncannily busy as that of one who lies awake throughout a white and sleepless night. And she had believed this bodiless activity to be the process of sound reasoning; she had found some security in the conclusions she had formed.

But when they turned back toward the apartment the whole brilliant structure

proved treacherous. It toppled. She was back where she had started, cornered, driven now for time. She couldn't stand it. He would go—and he'd never come back. Never! What was there in it for her? What was she waiting for?

Play the game? Fight? She knew she wasn't clever like Felicity, but she conceived what she thought was a desperate expedient, nor realized that it was pitifully transparent. There was no elevator in their building. Perry had a habit of striking matches to light the darker portions of the stairs, though that was silly. She'd told him; she knew every step of the way. But to-night when he struck the first one, she raced ahead. When it flickered and suddenly went out, she crumpled. At her cry, which brought him swiftly, he found her a little heap upon the stair. Her ankle was doubled beneath her.

"I've twisted it," she said.

She wasn't clever, like Felicity, and yet how simple it was!

He picked her up. He carried her like no weight at all. And she lay very close against him, her head on his crooked elbow, her arms about his neck. They had left a light burning in the box of a sitting-room. And as he entered there Perry Blair, looking down at her delicately parted lips and faintly fatigue-penciled eyes, breathed deeply once, and smiled.

He'd been quickly skeptical; he was certain now. No one who had just twisted an ankle was content and serene as that.

And that was when Perry Blair first saw Cecille Manners—first saw her with seeing eyes. He looked down at her and in that instant learned how infinitely precious and flagrantly bold girlhood like hers could be.

He carried her to a couch. She lay quiet, her eyes still closed. But when, after a glance at his watch, he would have tried to

ascertain the extent of the damage, which he knew was no damage at all, she sprang erect, and flamed at him, and struck his hands aside.

"No!" she gasped. "No!"

And then she put her hands upon her face.

"I didn't twist it." Her very voice was dreary. "I just couldn't face it, that was all. I thought maybe, if you carried me upstairs—if once you felt me in your arms—ugh!" She made a sound, a gesture as of nausea. And yet, after a moment, with surprising steadiness:

"Had you just as soon go now? I wish—I wish you'd go."

He gave her her wish so quietly that when she looked again she was surprised not to see him still there. In the lower hall he stopped a moment and stood with his head on one side as a man stands who listens. He made as if to climb the stairs again, and shook his head. Holliday came first, and he'd have to hurry.

In the box of a sitting-room above Cecille

sat and also listened. But she made no move as if to follow. She just half stretched her arms toward the stairway when finally she knew that he was gone.

"Oh!" she cried then. "Oh, dear. Oh, dear. Oh, God!"

CHAPTER XI

POTS AND PANS!

THE rest tells more quickly by far.

A raised, roped platform—two lithe bodies—a pavilion of white faces. Not the first round, nor the second, nor the seventh. The intermission which followed it rather, and a crowd grown strangely silent.

Perry Blair went back to his seat at the clang of the bell. Jack English was in his corner, and Hamilton, for he had been unwilling to trust anyone else. And lying back under their hurried, efficient ministrations he looked out upon the banks of faces.

They were tense; it was easy to see that, just as it was easy to sense that theirs was no ordinary tension. And he understood what it meant. Word had seeped from tier to tier, spread like a drop of ink in a glass of

water, until it had colored the entire mass. Only a very select few were "in the know" of what that eighth round had been planned to develop, yet they somehow had leavened the whole audience with anticipation, by an indefinite word or two.

"The eighth," they were whispering among themselves. "Watch this now; here's where something happens!"

They had hooted Perry as he entered the ring; saluted him with catcalls and a few out-and-out hisses. He'd wondered then if any other champion had ever been saluted in just that fashion before; he'd tried to smile. He wasn't trying any more.

But Holliday was. Across in his corner Holliday was nodding to his handlers and grinning widely, just as he had grinned all through the fight so far. And so far it had been a mild battle, a showy thing of pretty footwork and flashy boxing. But it hadn't been harmful to either of them. Holliday,

it appeared, had been quite content to let it go along that way from round to round, though it was the style of fighting best suited to his opponent. And he had proved himself faster at it, cleverer, than Perry had expected.

Yet it was not Holliday's cleverness, but his bounding, surging strength which compelled his thoughts. Strength like that, which tossed him like a chip in the clinches, was no new thing to him. He'd often been handled that way, with the same ease, by men heavier than himself,—by Jack English, for example. And Holliday was heavier; he knew that he had given away pounds in the weighing in; that there had been crookedness at the scales, but he hadn't tried to prove it. Yet Holliday was stronger even than Jack English, unbelievably stronger. And Perry knew now that he was about to test that strength to the uttermost. Holliday had romped with the roughness of a great puppy; now it was going

to be different. It was going to be the destruction-rush of a young bull.

English too felt what was coming, just as he did; just as did the whole quiet house. English wasn't trying hard to hide his anxiety.

"He's strong," he was saying. "Boy, he's strong! Keep away from him—keep away from him all you can. For if he ever backs you into a corner he's going to knock you dead!"

Perry nodded. He meant to, if he could. He was going to try to keep away. And on the other side of the ring Holliday was talking easily out of the corner of his mouth.

"This guy's no set-up," he was saying. "He's faster than a fool. But kin he hit—that's what I'm wondering. Kin he hit? An' that's what I'm going to find out."

And then the bell, and the whole house leaning forward.

They came slowly from their corners,

Holliday bull-necked, compact, a grinning menace, Perry lighter, whiter, sober. The first minute of that round was a repetition of all those that had gone before; lightning feints, nimble dancing steps, the cautious trickery of antagonists feeling each other out.

And yet the house, contrary to custom, did not grow impatient of such tactics and call loudly for more damaging effort. It waited. A minute and a half passed—two minutes—and they were going faster—faster. And then Holliday, grinning into Perry's face, winked broadly and swung wildly with his right. Perry stepped easily inside the blow and put his left to the other's face. It was a light blow, Perry knew that. There was no snap, no sting in it. But immediately Holliday winced as though it had hurt him and for the first time gave ground.

He followed Holliday up. This was the round in which Holliday was to quit, the round upon which Perry had had his mind

riveted for weeks. He wondered—had Dunham after all been on the level with his promised crookedness? He followed Holliday up, carefully. And again a wild right swing, a light step inside, a light left to the face. And then Holliday, holding him with disturbing ease in a clinch, pressed his mouth close to Perry's ear.

"Shoot it over, now," he muttered. "Shoot it—don't pull it. It mustn't look too raw. I'm going to open up—start it from the floor!"

They clung in the clinch. The referee tore at them, raving at them to break. He pried them apart at last and passed between them to make the breaking cleaner. And as he did so, Holliday dropped his guard.

"Shoot it!" he hissed.

Perry wondered—but he knew better! He therefore merely made as if to set himself for the punch. He drove his right hand to the other's chin. But in that same instant as

he took the blow Holliday lashed back at him, ferociously. Had Perry swung with all he had; had he been going with his punch; had he even been set firmly upon his feet to deliver it, Holliday's treacherous hook would have dropped him for the count.

As it was, though he had gone limply back, it spun him round and hurled him down. But it did not hurt him much. Lying half-raised on one hand, waiting out the count, he was thinking how like an explosion the roar from the audience had been. How moblike and blood-hungry. How the crowd hated him!

And Holliday was laughing down at him, leering. Double-crossed? Did Holliday think he was that credulous? But he had tested Holliday's strength and feared it more than ever. When finally he had to rise he dodged the other with a swift, sideways wriggle. The bell sounded almost immediately.

English was less worried than before, which was queer.

"That's the stuff," he praised. "Keep away and let him wear himself out. Let him beat himself."

But Perry questioned whether he was going to be able to keep away, and there was another angle to it, too.

"He'll be sure now that I can't hurt him," he thought. And that was exactly what Holliday at that moment was telling his seconds.

"Yu' got that, didn't you?" he demanded, again from the corner of his mouth. "Flush on the chin I took it. And it never made me blink. Hit? He couldn't dent cream cheese. If I'd ever a'ripped one into him like that I'd a'torn away half his lid. Watch this, now—watch this, because it's going to be good!"

And it was from his viewpoint and from the viewpoint of the partisan spectators.

At the bell's call Holliday rushed across

the ring, guard wide, gloves flailing. It was a spectacular rush, but Perry eluded him easily and slipped agilely away. Holliday whirled and blundered after him. Perry ducked under his swinging arms and danced again into the open. And then Holliday staged it, the scene which was going to be good.

Abruptly he ceased to pursue. He stopped and stood flat-footed in the middle of the ring, hands hanging idle at his hips, scowling after his opponent.

"Hey, you!" he bellowed, so loudly that his voice reached the rafters. "W'at t'ell do yu' think this is—puss-in-the-corner? Cut out the marathon, and come on and fight."

Indeed it was good; it was one of those dearly desired comedy moments which Holliday knew would grow epic in the re-telling. Holliday was a good showman. There were more cat-calls, more jeers, and cries of, "Yellow—yellow!"

And then Holliday went after him—and the house went mad. He blundered no longer in his pursuit, no longer played to the crowd. Like a blast of vengeance he struck Perry, enveloped him, smothered him in a fury of blows.

Perry tried to get away and couldn't get away. From the center of the ring to the ropes he was battered, staggering. He went down, and struggled up. And went down again.

He made no attempt to strike back, nor would that have availed him much. Holliday had tested his strength and was contemptuous of it. Holliday was boring in and in with crushing blows that tore past glove and guard.

The house was now a screaming, tossing bedlam, the ring a welter. He heard English barking at him. Cover up! He was covered up. Blam! He dropped and rolled away and came again erect. And blam! He

was covered up, as much as any man could cover. And then a glove sank into the pit of his stomach and doubled him over, sickened him, racked him with white-hot pain.

He got away again. Fight? They were shouting at him to fight. Did they think he wasn't fighting? He was fighting with brain and heart and body to live this wild storm through. Again Holliday got him in a corner. Holliday's bull-strength was not believable. Again he got him just above the belt. And he couldn't help it this time—this time he had to do it. He dropped a little his guard. And then it happened. It struck him then. The roof came down!

As he lay head on the arm curled under him he knew it must have been the roof. By nothing else could he have been so smitten. The roof must have fallen, though the faces around him were still tossing and swaying, though the referee stood counting above him, though there was no wreckage. And the

clarity of his mind astonished and pleased him. A brick roof—sure! A brick roof! That was unusual, very unusual. But it had to be that. It was a brick without a doubt which had struck him.

He knew the house was roaring—was sure of it—and yet he couldn't hear them at all. And that was strange, because he could hear the referee; he could hear Jack English. Jack was pleading—good old Jack!—begging him to get up. Apparently Jack didn't know that the roof had come down and stopped the fight. But the referee? Would he toll on endlessly before he noticed it? He should know; he'd been close at hand when it happened. He felt a warm emotion, a sense of comradeship, for the referee. He'd surely been square; he'd made Holliday break clean. He felt an impulse to joke with the referee, to banter him, and bid him count a million if he wanted to.

And then another thought. How easily he

was thinking! With what precision! Yellow! They might think him yellow, even if the roof had fallen, if he didn't get up. They might think—At that he rolled over and discovered that there were miles of bodiless space between his head and his feet. It made the latter hard to handle, but he managed it doggedly. He climbed to his knees and wavered erect. And on the stroke of ten Holliday smashed him down again.

Yellow? Well, he'd get right up this time. He started to; he even staggered after Holliday who now appeared to be the one who wouldn't stand and fight, when he felt English dragging him back. Even English was against him. Holding his arms! Bound he'd lose! He lashed out at English; and then, like a distant echo, he remembered the sound of a bell.

He let them put him upon his stool and stretch him out. Let them work over him frantically. The brick from the roof ap-

parently had cut above one eye, almost to the bone. But English was fixing it—good old English! He shouldn't have lost his temper and swung on English like that. English was propping the lid open and sticking it so with adhesive.

And then there was the bell. How light his legs felt, and his arms! And he'd doubted that the adhesive would do much; with the first savage slash Holliday tore it away and the lid hung closed again. But he could see from the other eye even though that seemed but a puffy mass. There was a slit from which he could look out upon an insane, tumultuous world.

So he complimented himself upon his cunning. They thought Holliday had blinded him; had closed both his eyes so that he could not see at all, did they? Well, he could! Oh, he was foolin' 'em. Champion!

Once he'd looked that word up in a dictionary, just after he whipped Fanchette;

looked it up a little sheepishly, though he was alone at the time. Champion:—One who by beating all rivals has obtained an acknowledged supremacy. Then Devereau and Dunham were right. According to that he wasn't a champion. Nobody acknowledged him. But he'd teach 'em a better definition. A champion was someone who could go right on fighting when everybody was cheering for the other guy. A champion was somebody who could fool 'em that easy!—that complete! You bet! Who could fight and think at the same time, that clearly!—that logically!—like he was doing.

But he fell down often. Yet that didn't prevent this reasoning things out. And he didn't wait now for the count, either. He'd get right up each time, he'd decided, so that they could not call him yellow. They hated him so. But he knew the answer to that, too, at last. And that gave him something to laugh at, the way Holliday had grinned.

Honesty was the best policy! He fair rocked with glee—and got up again!

Now English had him by the arm. He wouldn't hit English—English meant well if he wasn't a champion. He'd follow English docilely and sit down as he was ordered. He must have missed the bell again.

But English's crying, his whimpering, bothered him. It was a sniffling, wild-beast whine. That's the way a wolf or a tiger would sound, outside the circle of a fire's glow, unable to help its kitten or cub. But it annoyed him just the same—took his mind off important things. And what had English to cry over anyway? The roof hadn't fallen on him.

There was something about that that he hadn't yet got quite straight in his mind. If he could—if he could—A brick roof didn't sound right. If he could just force his brain a little further. It was urgent—he could fight better—it had a direct bearing on the

fight. But there was that damned bell again. It interrupted him; broke in upon his train of reasoning. But he'd get up and fight some more. That was what they'd paid their money to see. He'd fight and try to think it out at the same time.

He rose and coughed, sick at his stomach—and sat suddenly down. But Holliday'd not hit him so hard that time, it seemed. Just pushed him maybe. That was the game—let him wear himself out! He got up again. Then he noticed another thing. The crowd had been screaming, "Kill him! Kill him!" for hours and hours. Now each time that Holliday struck him they groaned. Well, maybe it was time for him to hit Holliday; maybe that was what was the matter. He'd try to accommodate 'em. He pushed the referee aside and swung. But his glove met nothing. The floor came up and hit him in the face, that was all. Funny floor! Funny roof! No place to hold a prizefight. And

where was Holliday, anyway? Holliday'd been playing for his good eye, till that was practically closed, too, and he couldn't see distinctly, couldn't see much of anything. He'd grope for him—he did it—and got up again!

They were shouting something else now. Could not suit 'em. "Take him out—take him out!" Who, him? He cursed at them, nor knew that he merely gibbered from frightful lips. They'd not rob *him* that way of his title! Then he saw Hamilton pick up a towel and start to toss it into the ring. Lucky he was near him! He grabbed that towel and flung it away—and fell down heavily—and got up again!

He wanted to curse Hamilton, too, but didn't have the time. He seemed to be hurtling to one side of the ring and then the other, yet effortlessly, as lightly as thistledown. Couldn't stop for anything—Holliday insisted on fighting right along. He

couldn't remember it was so long since he had laid a glove on Holliday.

And then again a lull. What was it? The end of a round, or the beginning of one? He'd better not sit down, or Devereau and Dunham would tell 'em he was yellow, and they'd believe. End of a round, apparently. English was crying over him again, whimpering helplessly. He wished they'd dispense entirely with the bell. Just fight right along —could keep your mind on things that way; he was awful sick—just noticed that!

And then he heard Hamilton trying to square himself for what he'd tried to do with the towel.

"He's out, I tell you!" Hamilton was saying. "He's out standing on his feet!"

So he was even fooling his own seconds! Out standing on his feet? Why, he'd been out for rounds and rounds! He didn't quite know how many. But that didn't make any difference—but then Hamilton didn't know

much about the boxing game—he was just a sports writer!

"What round is it?" he asked. "Sixteenth!" Liars! Or maybe they were joking. Anyway, he knew better. The tenth or eleventh, perhaps, but never the sixteenth.

Was that the bell? No, he'd just kicked the water-pail? Shouldn't have a tin pail in the ring, not even a new one. Ought to be a wooden bucket. Well, they could just tell him when the bell did ring, and give him a little shove in Holliday's direction, if they would. That was it—all right—and the roof came down!

He found a way to remedy that; he'd hold it up. Hang onto Holliday's arms, that was it. They were awful sticky, yet slippery, but he'd try. And getting up was a slower business now in spite of himself. But if they couldn't see that he'd taken quite a bit of punishment and had a right to be a little dizzy, let 'em sit and sulk. They weren't

shouting any more, that was certain; they weren't even groaning happily when Holliday hit him. And damn that roof! Or was it the floor? It certainly had been *under* the chin that time. Got to get up—and it didn't seem possible—didn't seem as if he could. Was that English holding him? Round was over? "Pardon me. Didn't hear the bell. They'd ought to have a siren!"

And so back to his riddle. It wasn't a brick roof—ah, there was the key to the whole puzzling problem. Let him once solve that—you just let him get clear on that point—and see!

The bell! Holliday certainly was polite. He'd come all the way across the ring in one leap to meet him. Saved him staggering miles and miles toward the other corner. And thud! The roof—but it wasn't a thud. It was a crash—a tinny clangor. Shouldn't have a tin pail—might have cut himself. He got up, and promptly ran into something and

sat down again. It was easier to think, however, in that position. Tin! Tin! A tin roof? That sounded more like it. Only it wasn't tin; it was—it was—

"Got it!" he shouted—he thought he shouted, while men thought he was coughing blood. "Got it! Got it! Solved!"

And now that he knew the answer he could put his mind on this fight.

What round? The eighteenth? They'd lost count probably, but anyway it had gone far enough. He'd finish it now. He had hardly hit Holliday at all; he'd hit him now. Where was he? He groped, and then he found him; found him by the simple process of noting from which quarter Holliday's last blow came. Right there in front of him, standing there and measuring him and driving it into his unprotected face.

It must look queer to the crowd, him not keeping his guard up or anything. They'd think he was letting Holliday knock him out.

He'd better get it over with; he was consumed with eagerness, anyhow, to tell Hamilton and English the joke about the roof, the joke which was on himself.

So he swayed with the next blow and rocked lightly back. He'd sit down no more. He swayed with the next one, but this time he snapped forward, glove and arm and shoulder. This time, on the rebound, he put all he had into it; and that after all was what a champion really was: A guy who had something always left to call on, a guy who could shoot it all, when the crisis came.

And even Holliday must have been unwary and fooled and thought he was out standing up. For this time he did not miss. Nor did the floor rise. Nor Holliday. Tough on Holliday. Solved!

He allowed the referee to hold aloft his hand; good referee,—square. He fell out of the ring—clumsy!—and passed down miles and miles of aisle between pale faces. What

were *they* goggling at? Of course he was a little cut up and bruised; what did they expect? He'd taken some punishment. They'd say now, he supposed, that he had no skill.

But they drew back and looked away, or dropped their eyes; they acted almost shamed. Well, some of them had been mistaken; they'd called him yellow. He wanted to stop and tell 'em it was not so, but he couldn't spare the time just now. He had to hurry to his dressing-room and tell Hamilton and English the joke,—this joke at his own expense.

English had an idea apparently that he was helping him, holding him up. Well, he wasn't. He'd bet it was fourteen feet from his neck to his ankles. But the joke—had they closed the door? Then listen!

"The roof! I thought it was the roof that fell on me! Can you beat that? First a brick roof—then a tin one—" He thought it was laughter which doubled him up.

"And do you know what it really was?" He gave them ample time but received no answer. So he shouted it aloud; he thought he shouted:

"Not the roof at all! Not brick—not even tin! Pots and pans! Pots and pans! Aluminum! Dozens! A whole set of 'em!"

He thought it was laughter which doubled him up; then found he was deathly sick. Was this the floor he was lying upon, or a table? Because if it was the floor he'd have to get up; he didn't know whether he could make it again or not but he'd be a game guy and try. They were holding him? All right, let it go at that. Holliday'd not got up either. He could see Holliday just as plain —just as clear!—unconscious on the canvas. Then the fight must be over—he was glad of that . . .

He came to crying weakly.

CHAPTER XII

WINNER TAKE ALL

HIS first conscious thought was of his great need to go to her quickly, yet he waited several days to give his marked face time to heal, Hamilton and Jack English waiting with him. And at length, on the way north, he shyly opened his heart to them; he told them of his plan. Because he was urgent about it, and more than a little panicky, they promised they would see him through with it; when they parted at Grand Central it was to be for only an hour or two.

"You'll not fail me?" he asked anxiously.

Hamilton made game of him, a little.

"We'll be there," he answered. "Where's your nerve, man? We'll be there with our hair in a braid."

"We'll be there," echoed English soberly. "We'll be in your corner."

He very nearly missed her; and yet afterward she always insisted that she was sure he would come, even in that last minute while she stood looking about to be certain that she had overlooked nothing in the apartment which she could no longer have afforded to keep even had she wanted to. Therefore her start at his appearance upon the threshold did not equal his surprise at the sight of her dressed for traveling, her belongings already packed.

For it fairly demoralized him. Like every good tactician he had coped with as many details as could be handled in advance, but against this moment his preparation had been none too thorough. Desperately, once or twice, he had tried to drill himself for it, practicing a line or two which he hoped he could remember.

"I'm not her kind; I'm different from what

she is," he had told himself, "and I will tell her that. But I'll tell her, too, that I'll not *stay* different any longer than it can be helped. I am no dunce; I'll learn to be her kind."

But, slipping away too happily into thoughts of how different she was from everyone else in the whole world, beyond that he had not found it easy to go. None too steadily he had decided to rely upon inspiration. And now at the sight of her in a scant blue suit and tiny hat, bag in hand before him, every last syllable of his rehearsals basely failed him.

He looked from her inquiring eyes to the stripped room. She believed she understood that survey.

"Felicity's gone," she said in a voice that he hardly recognized as her own. "She went with Dunham, the afternoon of the day you left for the South. I did not tell you then because—"

It seemed too obvious, so she left it unsaid.

At that he reddened and was a little ashamed and humbler than ever at heart. But he'd not thought of Felicity for weeks; he'd never thought of her like this.

"Oh," was all he could manage. "Oh. And you—?"

She thought she understood his blankness.

"I was just going myself."

"Where?" He was suddenly afraid that it was too late for his plan,—that it had always been too late.

"I don't know," she answered. "Home, maybe—where I used to live. It doesn't much matter—anywhere."

Her eyes had not once left his face. And now he saw that they were as changed as her voice. He would have said, had they been other than hers, that they were bitter; no, not bitter; sardonic and mocking. Temporarily like Felicity's. And she must be very tired, judging from her voice, even more tired and wan than she looked.

The phrases which he had rehearsed deserted him treacherously.

"Then—then, why not come with me?" he labored over it. "I've a drawing-room on the Lake Shore on the five o'clock. I knew about Felicity; that wasn't why I came back. I came because I thought maybe we could go out—you and I—and look around together."

He knew it was a poor thing of weak words and not what his inarticulate heart would have uttered. Yet he was not prepared for her reception of it.

She laughed up into his face, a hard little, crisp little laugh.

"Why not?" she said. "Why not?"

And when he took her in his arms and kissed her it was not as he had dreamed it would be. Her body was slack, her lips not merely passive but cold against his own. His heart heavy for reasons which he could not name, he set her quickly free.

"I'll be back for you, then, at three," he said. "Will you be ready?"

As casually, it came to him, just as calmly he might have discussed his plan with any man.

"At three," she repeated. "I'll be ready."

He left her, not as happy as when he had sped up the stairs; left her demoralized now. In the interlude before his return she sat motionless, her mind a tumult of doubt.

She too had dreamed what that embrace would be; she had wanted always to be near him, yet she had just shrunk from it.

"Who am I to dictate such terms to life?" Felicity had demanded.

"And who was she," in all that long month Cecille had been asking of herself, "who was *she?* And what was she waiting for?"

Even a percentage of happiness, Felicity had preached, would be less unendurable than no happiness—ever—at all; and she had at last convinced herself that this was so. Yet

now she shook with doubt. Was this dead thing the actuality which at any price she had hoped to save?

Once she was very close to flight; more than once, more childishly than she knew, she wished that she would die.

But she kept to her promise and waited; she was ready and went with him at three, though after he had put her in the taxi and climbed in beside her, she found it difficult to breathe. She could not have forced words from her throat had she wanted to, and he was as silent as she. For at the end of hours he had hit upon an explanation of this mood of hers, her trouble, and it was troubling him deeply, too. Two or three times, watching her still face and quiet hands, it had been upon the tip of his tongue to tell her that after all they could still abandon his plan.

He had not offered to kiss her again, nor even reached for her hand, and she had been grateful for this, almost hysterically grateful

as she recalled the little opportunities which she had once contrived for just such contacts. And the taxi was not merely stifling; it was like a trap. The seat was far too narrow. Even though she huddled into her corner the six inches of clear space which separated them was all too brief.

So they rode south, both unhappier with every turn of the wheels, till suddenly he saw her hands tighten into fists, and her lips begin to move.

"I can't," was what he made of that whisper. "Oh, ask him to stop—please—please!"

He did not question her; her face was enough. The cab pulled up to the curb. She flung open the door and started to get out. But she could not go like this—not without a word—not without some explanation—even if she had to brave his rage.

"I can't," she told him. The voice was tired, but not beaten—no. "I thought I could, because I loved you oh—so—much.

But I can't. I know it now; I've known it all along."

But he didn't seem angry; he seemed only gentle and sorry. And his voice sounded sorry, and kind.

"I think I knew it, too," he was saying, slowly; "knew it was wrong, all the while. But I didn't realize how wrong till I saw it was making you sad. At first it seemed to me that this would be the finer way, quiet and soon over, no fuss nor any crowd. I have seen weddings that were ribald and not sacred, and I wanted ours to be none of that. Just you and I and the minister, with Hamilton and English standing by; and then just you and I going away together, leaving no wise winking, no meaning whispers behind. And that *was* right,—but only half right; I have been selfish with you. It is a sober step for a girl like you; she wants her folks at such a time. We will wait now for your people."

She had paused to wait for his answer—his

anger—with one foot upon the running board, one foot on the curb. But slowly, as his voice went gravely on and on, she turned and faced him and listened, incredulous. The words were distinct enough; they drummed at her ears, but they did not penetrate, not even after he had finished, until she stared about her and saw how far they'd come. They were far south of Grand Central and Forty-second street. Then it went reeling through her.

He would have stepped out, but she pushed him back and followed him inside.

"Where were we going?" she gasped. But she knew—she knew! She wanted to laugh, and wanted to cry, and didn't know which to do.

"We have to get a license, you know," he told her soberly.

She decided then to cry, not much, just a little. But she made him smile.

"We've lost a lot of time," she sniffed brokenly. "You'd better tell him to hurry."

The driver had been disappointed; he had expected more of her. But then you couldn't never tell about them dames with real class. But he was deferential; he had recognized his fare.

"Where to, Mr. Blair?" he opened the door at that moment to ask. "We gotta step on 'er, if you still want to make it."

Perry ordered him to step on 'er.

Then the miracle came to pass. She found the worn seat yards too wide, the mean interior cathedral.

And Hamilton and Jack English did not fail them. They were waiting. They were "in his corner" as they had promised to be. They accompanied the bride and groom to the station. And while Hamilton was shaking hands with her husband, Jack English found opportunity for a word with his wife.

"Didn't I tell you?" he asked. "Didn't I say you'd picked a game guy?"

She was dewy of lip, star-eyed.

"You told me," she said.

He studied her with peculiar intentness.

"This game will never hold him," he at last went on. "He'll want to take you far, so his fight has just begun. You believe in him. You'll be proud of him, some day."

She dropped her eyes; she was too honest with herself not to admit that she had wondered about that, often hoped and therefore feared she might not be.

"I mean to," she answered, her voice not large. "And I'm proud enough, right now."

But not until hours after did she realize how proud. Hours later as she sat in their drawing-room on the Lake Shore Limited and watched her husband, just outside the open door, talking with a senator and a prominent divine, her tiny disloyalty punished her a little. How hard and clear cut his profile was—his nose was rather large! And how man-sure, and boyishly diffident. She'd be secure, her whole life through—and

she hated men who boasted. She suffered some for her snobbish wonder; but she was conscious of a new, great joy.

"My lad!" she tried it aloud. "My lad!" She laid her fingers to her throat. A pulse throbbed there.

How eager they seemed for his company; how interested! And there was no patronage in their manner; rather they sought to establish equality; they sought to be approved. This game would not hold him—and their chance was equal to any. They were both young, very young—though she was extremely mature for twenty years! Maybe—she didn't lean exactly toward the ministry—but perhaps a senator—

Her eyes grew misty and veiled; she was lost to all but her dreams.

And then the train stopped and she heard the senator talking, his voice very loud with no din of motion to drown it.

"I snapped my right over"—it punctured

her blissful gossamer of fancy—"I snapped my right over—and *he* made no more trouble for anyone, in *that* town."

She heard her husband answer, but could not make out the words. But apparently the prominent divine had been champing on the bit; the senator, she thought, must have interrupted him.

"—a bully, the town bully, and an extremely powerful man. But that did not deter me. I was outraged, you see—righteously indignant. So I hooked with my left—I believe, sir, that that is the correct term—"

The absurd, fat things! She heard her husband assuring him that it was. Her husband!

So later he returned to a very bright-eyed wife. He dropped into a seat and she was happier still at the happiness in his eyes. For a time he was quiet; then suddenly he slanted his head at her. He began to tell her about the pots and pans.

"Some battle!" he drawled at the finish of it. "Champion—winner take all!"

Nor had he been able to keep down a little note of pride. It was quite as if, still humbly, in his own plains' talk, he had assured her, "Your husband is no dub."

And so she started that soon to become better acquainted with him. He was no braggart with others; to his own wife he would boast a little. Husbands were likely to, she realized—she loved him more.

And the words had started a thought in her own head. She had lost that phrase of Felicity's, and searched for it, and was glad to find it again.

"Some battle," she echoed softly. "Some battle—winner take all."

Then she rose and went to him.

"Perry, lad," she murmured, "I'm not sure but what there are *two* champions, right here in this very car!"

CHAPTER XIII

BLUE FOR A BOY

"BUT would she have been happy?" A critic whose sex is indicated by her usage of the pronoun *she* instead of *they* once raised the question.

"Why not?" I asked unguardedly.

Obviously such stupidity as my counter-question evinced was worthy of some pity.

"Why, she was an—ah—superior sort of a girl; breeding, you know, and all that, or so I have gathered, while he—"

But I stayed no longer to listen. What was the use? There was not merely a little of snobbishness in her. I did not even insist that "she" might have been, or add that it was really true. But I went West promptly to see.

Perry Blair had scarcely guessed at the pos-

sibilities of that valley. There were five dozen, or five hundred white-faced Herefords under fence; or five thousand. I forget which, for I was not curious concerning these.

But having cornered her at last I put the question bluntly.

"What about that career?" I wanted to know. "There's a crying need just now for good senators—plain statesmanship handled neatly."

She colored a little.

"Wel-l-l," she was going to slide out of it if she could, "Perry's awfully busy right now, it's so hard to get trustworthy men. And—and then, anyhow, I'm not so sure I'd care to have him enter politics, as they are at present—even if—"

"Don't blame you," I concluded. "Wise decision. But what about the ministry—how about that?"

Here, however, she would have rallied and protested hotly that she had never been keen

about the ministry—not at all!—when an occurrence just outside the open door saved her the need.

Perry Blair—Blue Jeans, with no rent in his shirt and a nonsensically expensive hat—had been driving a nail into the wall. The nail had dodged and he had struck his thumb, and was commenting upon it plainly, though with no great heat, aloud.

And she grew pinker still.

"You are a hypocrite," I complained with scorn. "You should blush!" And dropped the matter there.

But I was less concerned with the question of their happiness. And that evening, when a puncher brought a pasteboard box in the mail and all innocently they opened it before me, I became very sure.

For the box held a pair of those inadequate articles of apparel known, I believe, as bootees, designed and executed in knitted silk for an expected new arrival. And they

forgot me, forgot that this expectation was supposed to be a secret, in exclaiming over the mystery of who had found them out.

Then she came upon the card. There was no name or address; just one line:

"Winner take all!" it read.

Yes—Felicity.

After a long period of grave silence which had come upon them:

"See!" she exclaimed softly. "Pink! A girl! Haven't I been telling you so, all along?"

"How does that signify?" Quickly he took up the challenge. Clearly here was a matter which had seen much discussion.

"Pink for a girl, and blue for a boy," she explained with conscious superiority.

But she couldn't continue to tease him. His face had become long.

"Perhaps not, dear," she murmured. And then, with a little air:

"Anyway, they'll be very useful, I'm sure.

They are exceedingly fine and dainty, and it is not easy to get things good enough, away out here."

But there he put his foot down. *She* had not been very keen about politics! Or the ministry! Indeed!

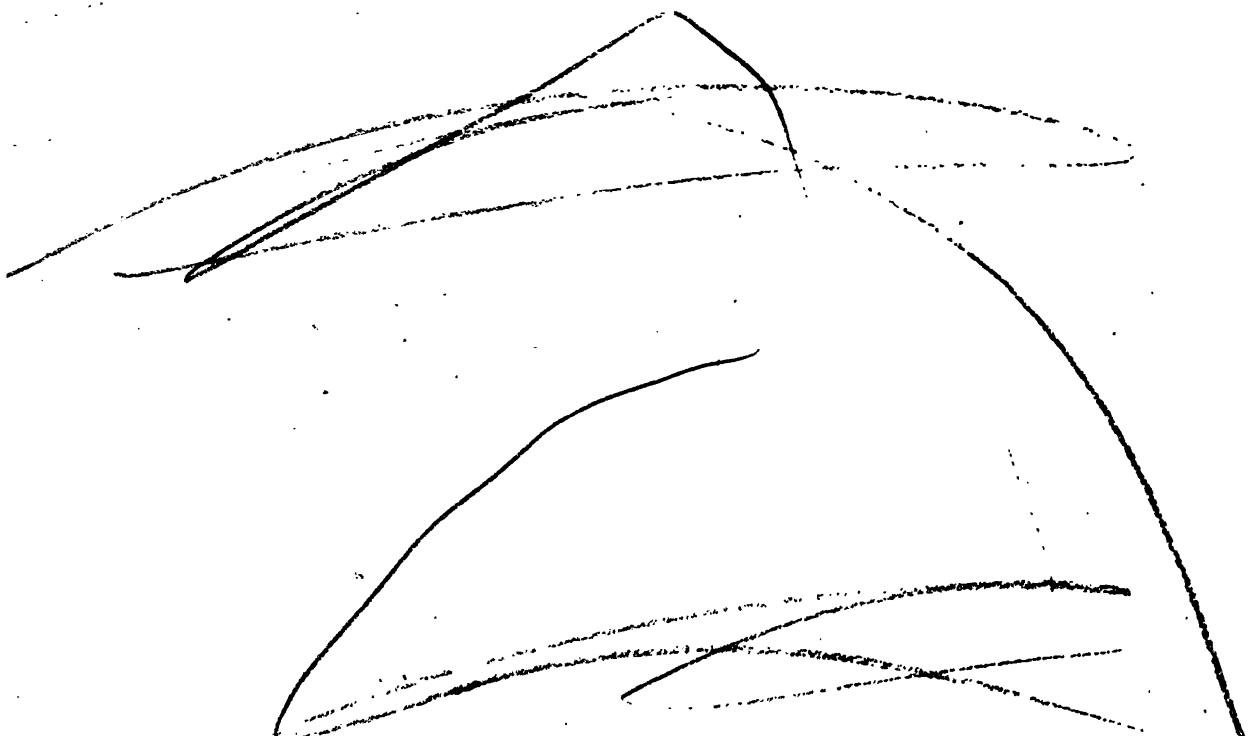
"Pink for a girl?" he asked. "That's straight?"

"That's straight."

"Then he'll not wear them, ever. No son of mine shall be made a sissy of, while he's still too helpless to prevent."

But there they started and grew red at my presence which they had forgotten, for I had to laugh.

Happy? I didn't answer the amateur critic, but I don't mind saying so here. And somehow I feel that I should know.

I'm Hamilton.

THE END.